

LOVE  
AND LIKING

BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
TIT FOR TAT

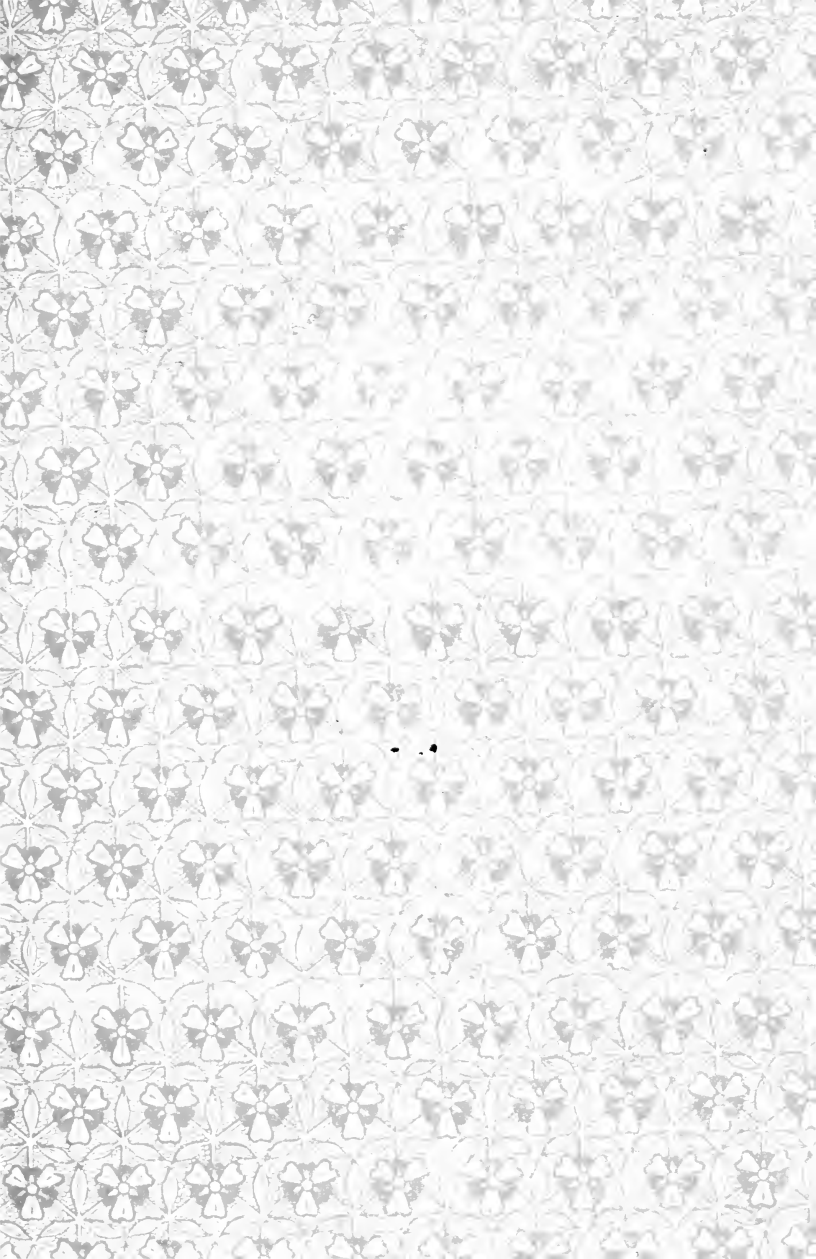


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# LOVE AND LIKING.



# LOVE AND LIKING.

A Novel.

BY

M. E. SMITH,

AUTHOR OF

"TIT-FOR-TAT," "IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN," "THE PITY OF IT,  
ETC., ETC.

"Tell me, where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart, or in the head ;  
How begot, how nourished ? "

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# LOVE AND LIKING.

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## CHAPTER I.

“Thou’lt break my heart, thou bonnie bird  
That sings upon the bough,  
For sae I sat, and sae I sang,  
And wist no’ o’ my fate.”

THE next day there was a dinner-party at Seapinks, a few hours before which Judy sent an excuse. Dulsie had caught a cold, and as Sybella and the squire were going, she stayed at home to keep her cousin company. Dulsie had taken her elder sister’s defection greatly to heart, and Judy could not bear the thought of her spending a long evening by herself, nervous under the depression of what might prove a rheumatic cold, and anxious as to Mabella’s future. She was perhaps not very sorry for the pretext. She felt the necessity of taking her feelings, under their present

perturbation, strictly to task. Without one atom of personal vanity, she was yet too quick of apprehension not to perceive that Lord Le Pole was, notwithstanding his *insouciant* manner and light badinage when others were present, thoroughly in earnest in his intentions regarding her. She knew she would ere long have to face, what she too certainly felt would be, the crisis of her life.

“Did she love him?”

Her heart gave but one answer.

But had she not loved Ned Rawson? Unerringly came the heart's reply, *it was not love*. Yet it might have been. Yes, she was sure of that. Had fate not cast Le Pole in her way perhaps, her mind might not have suddenly been awakened to its latent powers, nor she have discovered that her nature had deeper needs than could be filled by the merry companion of her quickly-vanishing girlhood.

He had been at pains, too, she remembered, to impress upon her the fact, according to his taking, of the intellectual inferiority of women. A man, to him, was the world to

himself; into his deeper monitions, his ambitions, his struggles, his work among men, a woman might never enter. A wife, however loved, would be to him, when the first gloss of possession had worn off, but as his luxurious country residence is to the city toiler. There he finds rest from the hurrying to and fro of the busy mart, luxurious ease for his tired energies, and beauty for his eyes, wearied of the dead monotony of brick and stone.

It was necessary, it was natural for a man, however occupied, however great, to have lighter moods and to give expression to his lighter nature. He could not have that utter relaxation he needed and loved with the stern mates of his working hours; it would not be seemly. Neither could he have that appreciation his soul craved. Men were never the heroes to each other they were to women.

But she should have all within her range that she could desire or his means bestow; all of dress, luxury, amusement. He would honour her, be true to her, keep even the winds of heaven from blowing too roughly on her, give up to her the all of self outside, not

the greater self that was his soul—yet even that in part should be hers, for she should be his religion.

All this, Judy knew, Ned would give, all this he would be to her, and but a few short weeks ago she did not seem to have wished for more, to have known that her heart craved for more. She had dreamt she loved him. Alas! from dreams such as these how many wake too late! But not little Judy. The pleasant spell was broken, and she knew that her lover-friend had

“ Asked for the costliest thing  
Ever made by the Hand above,  
A woman's heart, a woman's life,  
And a woman's wonderful love.”

She knew that he had asked

“ For that precious thing  
As a child might ask for a toy ;  
Demanding what others had died to win,  
With the reckless dash of a boy.”

But in this hour of silent questioning she summoned him to “the bar of her woman's soul,” and her heart gave the verdict. There was no voice to plead for him there.



Then she thought of that other, so lately found, yet now so one with her life, it seemed to her that he must always have been a part of that life. His voice sounded in her ear as no other voice had ever sounded, his eyes haunted her with an all-pervading presence. She thought of his words. They were not many, they had not known each other many days, yet how earnest they were—that was when they were quite alone. With light touches what garnered knowledge they told of, and, too, what depths of human sympathy; yet it was nothing outward that had made her captive. Measuring man with man in outward seeming, Ned had the advantage; and even in natural graces—truth, honour and kindness—he could lose nothing by comparison; but it was—

“The secret sympathy,  
The silver link, the silent tie,  
Which heart to heart and mind to mind  
In body and in soul can bind.”

She had placed him, too, at the bar of her woman's soul, and her heart had given the verdict, for *love* had pleaded for him there.

Came there then the sweet words he had sung  
the first day, counting such time by hours, of  
their meeting :

“ Nothing in the world is single,  
All things by a law divine  
In one another's being mingle,  
Why not I with thine ? ”

And she knew theirs had mingled. Then  
her eyes, soft and yearning, sought the sea  
slumbering restlessly in the placid moonlight,  
and she wondered with dreamy consciousness  
what it was that so instantly had quickened  
the unsuspected dormant principle of love  
within her breast ; but all of answer the ever-  
sounding and mysterious sea gave was “ love's  
best interpreter, a sigh.”

Her gaze travelled back to earth. She felt  
the influence of love everywhere, in the living  
heavens, in the teeming earth, in the silence  
and the shadow. Yet there was no answer to  
her quest. Then insensibly to her memory  
came the words of the passion-poet Byron :

“ Why did she love him ? Curious fool, be still ;  
Is human love the growth of human will ? ”

And Judy, closing her eyes, prayed that hers might be the growth of the will divine.

She was all alone in the drawing-room. Dulsie had gone to bed. She had, she said, a rheumatic chill, and if she took it in time it might be checked. She wished to be present at Judy's first ball, so she would take care of herself. Judy was glad to be alone. The quick minutes flew, no loneliness had made time laggard. Quick-coming fancies had peopled the pleasant chamber. She was sitting in Dulsie's pillowy chair in the deep window, the doors of which were open wide. On the table in the centre of the room was the large lamp, its light, at Judy's instance, lowered. No other light was lit.

Her head leant back on the soft cushion. Her hands were idly clasped before her. On her bosom was a bunch of forget-me-nots. Suddenly a shadow fell on the gravel path beneath; she had not heard the step on the lawn. She started up, and with a face all aglow with love and pride, with the assured air of a joyous welcome, Ned Rawson appeared before her.

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Just for a second a guilty feeling of treachery touched her sensitive consciousness, but a glance at Ned's jubilant visage restored her self-possession.

"May I come in?" he asked, laughing with eyes and lips.

She held out her hand in greeting. He tripped as he stepped on to the matting, and she laughed. He held her hand in both of his, and looking down on her with his eyes full of happiness, said :

"I got your message from your mother, Judy, but you might have written it yourself."

"What message?" was on her tongue; she had sent none. But she checked herself in time; she did not care to convict her mother of an untruth.

"We are all very glad for your sake," she said with more warmth than she was aware of. Her heart smote her, for she did like him very much—she did not wish to pain him.

"Yes," he said, "it was a great triumph, and so unexpected, for I thought he would have run me hard."

"Have you taken your seat?" she asked.

“ Oh, yes.”

“ I needn’t ask on which side,” she said ; “ I had no idea you were such an ultra-radical,” and her sweet face, so child-like and piquant, took a shade of grave concern, her usual airy pose just a whit of dignity.

Ned started a moment, and then, as if overcome by an absurdity, burst into a merry laugh.

“ Ultra-radical !” he repeated ; “ why, Judy, who taught you that ? ”

The indignant blood mounted to her very brow, but that was all her protest. Her eyes fell on the forget-me-nots in her breast, and she forgave him. She even answered :

“ I wished to understand things, and so I read the papers, and Elsie Eber explained what was difficult. But I did not find the subject so very difficult, Mr. Rawson, and when I said you were ‘ ultra-radical ’ I meant you had gone further than your constituency required.”

With an air of badinage, but withal tenderness, Ned floundered on.

“ ‘ Mr. Rawson ! ’ Judy, you are in a pet. I humbly beg your pardon ; I did not see your

stockings matched your flowers," and he looked at the little blue forget-me-nots significantly.

She would not quarrel with him.

"The worse for you," she said lightly; "I am true blue. But I do think you might have drawn the line at the Licensing Bill, Ned." She looked up at him with frank eyes full of intelligence. "Ned, you have a grand career before you; won't you make principle your standard? You don't approve of that Bill—I have heard you say so to Mr. Horseman—you are not opposed to the duke's foreign policy, and yet you have pledged yourself against your convictions. I thought better things of you, Ned."

Could this be the little Judy of but a few weeks since? Judy with sharp repartee and girlish raillery, the best lawn-tennis bat in the county, the prettiest, loveliest, dearest, sweetest little girl that ever fell to a fellow's lot?—for Judy was his lot, that he knew. Why, it was only a few months since she asked him what was the use of politics, when there were so many laws; and did lawyers make the politicians, or the politicians the lawyers, and here

she was arraigning him on "political convictions" and questioning his "principles." It was that prig Le Pole, he was sure. Then he remembered, as in an inspired flash, that the fellow had worn a sprig of forget-me-nots the first day of nomination—it was on his breast—and with a terrible pang his jealousy took fire. He looked at her. She was a little pale, and her sweet eyes were grave; yet he had never seen her so lovely, so fresh, so pure. A great longing swelled in his heart to clasp her in his strong arms and lay her golden head on his breast. A protecting, absorbing love went out from him. Only a second-thought is electric. He stood almost in dumb amazement, then he said very gently:

"Little Judy, what can women know of politics? It is a great and abstruse study, only fit for a man's strong intellect. Women who enter upon man's province unsex themselves. They are queens of their own realms, and these are—society for the bolder spirits, home for gentler ones like you."

Alas for Ned! One peep into the little

heart swelling indignantly at his tirade, and he would have turned from the triumph he had so lately won as from a mocking crown of tinsel splendour.

She was not pale now; her eyes glowed with fire, but they fell on the flowers in her breast, and she smiled. Then she looked up at him proudly, but oh, so gently; he could have fallen at her feet and worshipped her where she stood.

“I think,” she said slowly and clearly, “I think a woman who cannot enter with a full apprehending mind into all her husband does and knows is not fit to be queen of his home. A woman’s intellect is as keen as a man’s; it is only a little less in degree, and necessarily so; except out of the natural order of things she is not called on to stand the wear and tear of the great vocations of man—politics and commerce and the learned professions—but she *is* called on to understand all these things that she may be his helpmeet, and so be a part of his innermost life, not merely the toy of his idle hours. A man who shuts a woman out of his larger life is no help-



meet for her. I doubt if he has a larger life."

A great fear made Ned's heart stand still.

"Judy, little Judy," he cried, "some one has come between us."

He took her hand. She drew it quickly away; her face was averted. Again the colour had left her cheeks, but she was very erect and very still.

"Some one," he cried with a voice that seemed to supplicate and demand in one, "some one has been trying to spoil my innocent dove, my little womanly darling. Nay, you must hear me. Girl as you are, Judy, you are a woman, too, and you know—you have always known I love you. You have let me think you love me, too. I did think so, and I valued my triumph at Oxminster most for your sake; it gave me a career and the hope of winning you. Do you forget how often you urged me to work? Was it only for my own sake?"

She shook her head as if in pain, and her eyes fell on the ground.

“I would not write, Judy, and fed on your message,—the message you sent me through your mother ; for I said I would tell you my story face to face, and get your answer from your own sweet lips. I told my uncle about it. He did not say much at first, or promise anything, but when he sent me on the invitation to the ball he wrote me this letter, and I brought it here to lay it at your feet. It tells me I am to be his heir, and he bids me bring my pretty bride home to Janitor Hall. I got it, Judy, the night I took my seat in the House, and there was not in that great assembly a prouder, a happier man. You will come, won’t you, Judy ? You will be my—— Oh, girl, do not break my heart. What has turned you to ice ? You are no coquette. You did not seek to win my heart, only to throw it aside as you would a coveted trinket when you were tired of it. You *did* love me. Listen to me, Judy. You shall learn all about politics if you will. I will be your teacher, darling. Judy, speak to me. Only lift your eyes ; do not be so still. Oh, who has come between us ? ” He spread his hands before her in an attitude of appeal,

bending his face, as if by the very force of his pain to draw hers upwards.

She did lift her eyes. The tears were streaming from them. She placed her palms in his, and said, speaking as firmly as she could, "Ned, beloved friend, it was all a great mistake. I do not love you—I never did love you, and indeed—indeed, I did not know you loved me as you do."

"What did you mean then," he demanded almost fiercely, holding her hands so tightly the old ring she wore cut into her finger, but she did not wince, "what did you mean by that message, by sending me your 'dear love'—these were your words—'that you were proud of me, and that the time would be long till you saw me again'?"

"Ned," she whispered, "I did not send you any message—poor mamma imagined I did, I suppose. I did not even know she had written to you."

A blank dismay spread over his agitated face; he let her hands go and staggered back.

"But you knew I loved you," he cried in mingled pain and anger. "Oh, girl, girl, you

have done an evil thing, you have blighted my life."

He turned from her, and with a proud gesture covered his anguished eyes with one hand.

Poor Judy, it was a terrible ordeal. Her self-accusation was bitter. She thought her heart would burst; she had been playing with fire, and she had not known it.

"Oh, Ned," she said, vainly checking her sobs, "I did not know what love was—was *then*. If I married you, and did not give you my whole heart, did not believe in you with an unquestioning belief, did not feel in every vein that we were one in one, that you were my king, my all, *then* I should blight your life. I cannot do this, Ned. You have a world in which there is no place for a wife. I have awakened, Ned, to my need of a fuller love than your nature can ever give. All I want, you have not to give; what I have to give, you do not want. Ned, dear Ned, we should but blight each other's lives. Forgive me."

The tears came in streams, falling on the pale forget-me-nots.

“And be my friend still ; a friend is very near one’s heart, Ned, and I do love you very dearly, but not with the love that alone makes marriage holy. I did not think to wound you so.”

She took the hand that hung powerless by his side. He gave a little shiver at her touch. She raised it to her lips and kissed it, then she turned silently away and made as if to leave the room. But with an uncontrollable impulse and a great sob of anguish he caught her to his breast, pressed his lips fiercely on hers, whispering, “Now I shall always know they were mine first,” and unloosed her, gently steadying her against the open door at the window, then plucked the flowers from her breast, and dashed across the lawn out into the night. So sudden, so blind his rush, he did not see a figure standing in the very centre of the green, under the cover of a bush ; neither did he look back, or he would have seen it issue from the gate with a quick defiant step and hasten outwards to the shore. It was Lord Le Pole.

## CHAPTER II.

“With centric and eccentric scribbled o’er.”

It was nearly twelve o’clock before Ned returned to his hotel. As he came slowly along the pavement an intimate acquaintance could have noted a change in the entire man. The youth seemed dashed from his face. There were hard lines round his handsome mouth, a knit in his smooth brow, and a cold, far-seeking look in his eyes. He stooped, too, and his hands were restless.

At the door of the hotel was a rather ancient travelling-carriage, to which were attached two rough and sturdy plough-horses. A servant in loose-fitting country-made livery and old-fashioned hat with tarnished gold band was helping a porter in with an old battered imperial. A venerable-looking, tall and commanding woman stood in the hall; her attire was in keeping with the equipage;

she had just vacated a long cloak of brown satin, with velvet cape, fastened in front by great gold clasps, and a bonnet with an elevated crown and overshadowing leaf, surmounted by a bird of paradise feather, thick low shoes with broad ties, and tan-leather gloves. A long veil of Chantilly lace hung wispily at the side of her bonnet.

She was to all appearance an invader. The waiters whispered in the background, and maids peeped through the side doors affrighted. Mr. Barnes, the landlord, was standing seemingly bewildered before her.

As Ned entered he was followed by the admiral and Mrs. Trelawney. They had been dining at Seapinks, and had walked home. The tableau was suggestive of a breeze.

"Madam," repeated Mr. Barnes, "I have only one vacant room, and that will be occupied at an early hour to-morrow. I understood from Mrs. Trelawney," bowing to that lady, "that you were to be accommodated at Egbert Lodge."

"Miss Le Pole?" said Catty with a merry twinkle in her eye, in anticipation of fun, as

she came gracefully forward and introduced herself.

She was received with a court courtesy that would have done honour to her Devonshire Grace in the days of the Regency.

The temptation was irresistible; Catty performed its fellow with the gravest of faces and stateliest of miens.

“Mr. Egbert told me,” she said, “that he expected you at the Lodge to-morrow. He will be greatly distressed when he hears you are here.”

“Madam,” replied Miss Le Pole, “I never had the slightest intention of being any one’s guest but my own. I suppose, Mr. Barnes, there is no objection to my using the room you say is vacant for to-night. I intend to drive straight home from the ball.”

“It is so small, madam,” said the landlord in real distress, “it could not possibly hold your luggage.”

He looked at the huge imperial and then at the multifarious articles heaped on its top, which were taken from the carriage.

“Jonas,” cried Catty, wheeling round, but



only in time to see that individual sneaking off as quickly as his little legs could carry him.

Ned had watched the scene without a sign that the humour of it touched him. There was a present hardness on his face that bid defiance to mirth. As Mr. Barnes ceased speaking, he came forward and with a low bow placed his room at Miss Le Pole's service. "It was a large airy one," he said, "any nook did for a bachelor."

Miss Le Pole executed another reverence, not the less stately for the gracious smile that accompanied it.

"May I ask your name, sir?" she said.

"Rawson," he replied, adding as he turned away; "I will see my things are cleared out, that you may get in at once."

"Stop, Mr. Rawson," she cried; "you are the new member for Oxminster, I presume?"

Ned bowed.

"I beg to thank you for your politeness. I shall not forget it, and if you will honour me with your company at the Manor House in September I shall be pleased to turn you loose among the partridges. Just drop me a

line to say you are coming, and I'll send to Nettlethorp to meet you."

Ned thanked her indifferently and hastened away.

Catty, with *empressement* and sly deference, now asked if she could be of any use to Miss Le Pole ; but the old lady, whom nothing ever escaped, had understood the handsome Irish-woman's derision. She knew that Catty was turning her into ridicule, so she replied grimly, and with old-fashioned pronunciation :

"I'm much obleeged to you, ma'am, but I never found ornamental things of much use. I'm not accustomed to gim-crackery. Pray don't let my distresses keep you from your grandfather."

She knew perfectly well the relation the ill-matched pair bore to each other ; the ring of the "Jonas" uttered by Catty had made that clear.

Catty laughed good-humouredly, heedless of some ill-repressed tittering. She had a flawless temper.

"Oh, he's my husband," she cried ; "I picked him up when I was *bric-à-brac* hunting ;

it's not every day one comes across an antediluvian admiral. I dote on oddities, ta-ta ;” and she kissed the tips of her fingers to Miss Le Pole as she tripped off. But suddenly, throwing her head back, she called out, “It's not a *fancy* ball, remember.”

Catty's skirt was long. With a saucy fling she had thrown it full length on the ground. It caught in a basket standing beside the imperial and upset it ; the contents were eggs, and eggs are brittle. Full of penitence she hastened back to the rescue, but to escape the mess which spread as the eggs rolled over and over and broke, she jumped upon a large hamper at a little distance.

“I hold you responsible,” cried Miss Le Pole to the distressed landlord. “There were six dozen in the basket, and the market price is ten to the shilling.”

“Oh, I'll pay,” called out Catty, adding in a stage whisper, “never could resist the antique.”

“Madam,” said Miss Le Pole in a deep voice, “don't measure other people's corn by your bushel.”

At that instant, as if in recognition of a familiar voice, a loud cackle came from the hamper on which Catty had taken refuge, and a goose's head was thrust through the opening of the lid. She sprang airily to the ground, gathered her train on her arm, and hurried away, crying, as a parting shot:

“Oh, two to one; I'm off.”

Bad tempers and dominant wills—master-minds, with flattering unction, they are called—generally have the best of it in this world. For after all peace-lovers are in the majority. Miss Le Pole was a master-mind, and so far she had had the best of it with all those with whom she had come in contact.

She had brought with her, according to her usual habit of combining business with pleasure, a quantity of miscellaneous farm and garden produce, and for fear of any further mishap she determined, on the spot, to make Mr. Barnes buy it as it stood. In vain he protested that the hotel gardens kept the house provided with vegetables and fruit, that he bought his geese, when in season, ready for the

fire, and that for the matter of poultry the yards were full to repletion.

Miss Le Pole let him protest, she meanwhile making a calculation in a memorandum book, which finished, she ruthlessly interrupted him.

“Total value,” she said, “sixty-three shillings; allowed for broken eggs; you can settle with me in the morning. You’ll find them all right and a bargain, no wear and tear of market, no carriage to pay, not a stale cabbage leaf or burst gooseberry. I see to everything myself.”

It was getting late, the town clock chimed half-past twelve. The carriage had rumbled off to its lodgment, the maids, one by one, had disappeared, only one waiter and the beleaguered landlord were left; the latter was simply helpless. Lord and Lady Albany were his honoured guests; this, their relative, was not a person to offend. Then he took comfort in the recollection of the good things he had heard said of her vendibles—they were always of prime quality and never overpriced. Besides, every porter had gone, something must be done, the live stock could not stay in the hall

all night; goodness knew how many cocks there were, they'd be sure to crow, indeed it was getting on to morning, he'd better be quick; if he didn't close at once she, maybe, wouldn't let the hampers be moved outside, and if any of them were smothered she'd hold him responsible. As it was, the eggs would be a dead loss; he was afraid they wouldn't do for omelettes, so all things considered, he gave his head one last vigorous shake, and closed.

"Hang it," he said to himself, "I'll make a dash at it. I'll pay on the nail and then it's off my mind."

With that he counted out three sovereigns and three shillings, which Miss Le Pole, who had been returning her memorandum-book to some mysterious receptacle within the precincts of her outer garments, and gathering up some small paper parcels, received with a business nod, saying:

"No need of a receipt for ready-money transactions," and under the convoy of her purchaser she went off to bed.

There are two classes of persons to whom people are chary of owning kinship, poor

relations and relations who are eccentric. On the whole, eccentricity is easier condoned than poverty. It happens, too, that when the eccentricity is associated with any rare gift or a dash of the *divina particula auræ*, or, better still, accompanies money, it is awarded a consideration seldom accorded to merit barren of these adventitious accessories. To be a "character" is to be, within very wide limits, irresponsible to society above or outside its uses and habits.

From this standpoint the noble family of Albany regarded their very unique relative, Miss Sarah Le Pole—Sally she was called in the primitive days of her youth. She had money and landed property, she was a person of consideration—though it could hardly be conceded that she was a considerate person—she was an individual, in fact, at whose approach people tucked their feet under their chairs, metaphorically speaking, or met her keen eyes with a fatuously deprecatory look; they were never sure what she might do or say—the possibilities of eccentricity are undefined.

Since the appearance of little Judy Aylmere on the scene, with the certainty, should she survive the present family, of the Egbert property, that portion of the old estate owned by Miss Le Pole had acquired an importance beyond its actual worth, which was considerable. Drawn once more within its ancient boundary it would make, with the larger portion still retained by its original owners, an estate of very considerable pretensions, and, incorporated with the at present heavily-burdened lands of Marlby Grange, a property second to none in the county of —shire, the vast acreage of which boasted of fewer owners in proportion than any other county in England. It was a stake worth social martyrdom to win. But, like all fanciful people, Miss Le Pole was a very uncanny person to circumvent. She was not amenable to delicate attentions; she was inaccessible to affectionate solicitude; nay, so capricious was she by nature, it was impossible to turn her weaknesses to account, and she did not need, so was not open to, sympathy in her pursuits. Her immediate relations said she



was void of family affection ; of her more distant relations she knew nothing. *Au reste*, she was not ill-natured, she was not inhospitable, but if her idiosyncrasies were pronounced her virtues were negative. She seldom went out of her way to do any one a good turn, though she was capable of doing substantial kindnesses on the impulse of the moment, and she acknowledged no claim on her heart or substance of living being. In a loose sort of way she responded to the feeble efforts of her nephew, Lord Albany, to keep up the fiction of family sociability. She went now and again, generally when she had business in the neighbourhood, to call on “ my niece Albany,” and at one time had honoured Le Pole with no small degree of notice. Perhaps if he had shown an agricultural bent, she might have allowed her incipient liking to grow, but when she saw that under him, as under his father, such matters would be relegated to a steward, she dropped him out of that loose receptacle she called her affections, and on his declining to attend an agricultural show at which she had a litter

of pigs, she cancelled a considerable bequest she had made in his favour.

But Miss Le Pole was a woman of many wills, as her vainly remonstrant business agent would some day testify. At the date of this story, had she been gathered to her fathers, she would have departed intestate, in which case her nephew Albany would have inherited as heir-at-law.

But, as is inherently the case in natures of cold affections, Miss Le Pole was singularly alive to sentiment. In her earlier years she dignified it by the name of love. The scent of the roses still hung round the name of Egbert, and, unknown to herself, this was the spring that had roused her to emerge from her retreat.

In accordance with her fixed habit of seeing to everything with her own eyes, aiding in everything where practicable with her own hands, Miss Le Pole had superintended the refurbishing of a very magnificent court dress and the adapting of it to a ball costume in the fashion of the day. A country dressmaker who went out by the day, and who was re-

sponsible for Miss Le Pole's usual attire, remodelled the rich velvet and lace with a very satisfactory result; the lace was exquisite Venetian point, and in itself would have condoned both poverty of stuff and rusticity of make, but Miss Le Pole was a woman of parts, and understood what was required of her. The body fitted to admiration, was up to date in cut, and the train of the orthodox length, rich with a Venetian point, which also draped the skirt, and a magnificent shawl of priceless value enveloped her figure. Diamonds of rare lustre studded the stomacher and encircled her neck and head, which last was dominated by a court plume springing from a refulgent *agrafe*.

As Miss Le Pole entered the ball-room Lord Albany experienced a lively sense of gratitude to his venerable relative; she had done justice to her station and to him. Neither youth nor beauty elicited deeper sentiments of admiration, or rank, of which there was an august sprinkling, of awe than the ancient and eccentric aunt of the Earl of Albany. The metamorphosis was startling. There

were those in that exclusive assembly who had last seen the strong-minded spinster in a dun coat and mushroom hat driving a tax-cart to market. Others who had chaffered with her over a doubtful heifer at the fair at Nettlethorp, and one, at any rate, who had been an eye-witness of her adroitness in mucking styes. A pair of gold eye-glasses, sparkling with diamond dust, was suspended from her neck by a slight Trichinopoli chain. The effect of these when she levelled them at an object was bewildering. Catty afterwards affirmed that Mr. Green, under their operation, staggered back, landing in Dulsie's arms, and that on recovering his perpendicular he had made hastily for the door, declaring that he had sun-stroke. Then she carried her height, five feet ten, as Miss Prance said, "like a duchess," and moved, Miss Turner, the spiral young lady, observed to Mr. Flagg, like a "barbaric empress of Roman traditions," to which informing illustration that gentleman adapted a name, and that was Zenobia.

"Ah, yes, Zenobia," sighed Miss Turner; "how types recur, classic types especially."

A great psychological mystery, particularly noses."

Mr. Flagg gave an answering sigh and said :

" Yes, Roman noses."



### CHAPTER III.

“Oh what damned minutes tells he o’er,  
Who dotes, yet doubts ; suspects, yet fondly loves.”

JUDY, pale as the palest blush-rose, sat out the first dance, for the partner for whom she had reserved her hand had left by an early train that morning for London. A sudden summons, it was understood. There were many who would gladly have taken the place of the absentee, but Judy had a ready excuse for all. She sat very still under a shading myrtle at the very top of the room. Lord Le Pole opened the ball with Mrs. Beaumorris. He also, like his ancient relative, seemed metamorphosed. The opening dance was a quadrille, through which he glided with dilatory step, as if motion were compulsory and existence a something in which he had neither part nor interest. He posed as simply a well-bred automaton, obedient to the mechanism of society.

“Richard is himself again,” said Creamy languidly as, the dance over, they walked round the room. “It is positively refreshing to see you refrigerated. You have found out, as I did long ago, that emotion is a blunder.”

“Nay, divine Creamy,” he returned, meeting her glance with one as warm, “you confound the effect with the cause. It is a woman who is ‘one of nature’s agreeable blunders.’”

“And therefore the cause of blunders,” she whispered meaningly; “and *à propos*”—she looked round the room as if struck by a sudden thought—“where is your rival?—in politics, I mean, of course.” This with another significant glance, which elicited only an imperceptible curl of the lip. “He was to have been here; I know he arrived yesterday.”

They had reached the seat occupied by Judy, and after a formal greeting on Lord Le Pole’s part, which just for the moment brought a scared look into the girl’s eyes, Creamy continued:

“Perhaps Miss Aylmere knows.”

Lord Le Pole placed his partner in a vacant chair and bowed.

“Knows what?” asked Judy.

“Where Neddy is,” cried Catty, bringing up a Colonel Bolton, who had asked to be introduced to Judy. She had been close behind Creamy, and had heard just enough to make her jump to the conclusion that it was Mr. Rawson whose whereabouts was in question.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” said Judy with spirit and not a little *hauteur*, resenting the battery of eyes turned on her tell-tale face, but her heart absolutely quivering with pain. “I was engaged to him for the first dance, but he has not come to claim me, so I’ve been doing wall-flower,” and she tried to laugh. “He cometh not,” she added.

“I am aweary, aweary,” lisped Creamy, slowly fanning herself.

Judy’s eyes looked dangerous. Le Pole, watching her covertly, stood apart. “Little traitress,” his heart was saying, throbbing painfully the while.

“Well,” exclaimed Catty in genuine sur-



prise, "you do astonish me;" then lapsing into a Milesianism by no means usual with her she added, "Sure, he went off by the first train to London this morning. I wouldn't have been a wall-flower for the Prime Minister himself, let alone the 'junior member,' as Miss Prance calls him."

She then introduced Judy, and floated away on the arm of her partner for the next dance, for which the orchestra was giving warning notes.

"For the next dance?" asked the colonel.

"Engaged," was the low answer, the colour returning to her pale cheeks.

"The next, then?"

"Engaged," was the answer again; but looking at her card she entered his name low down in the list, and with evident chagrin the gallant officer, who had a reputation as a lady-killer, bowed himself off in quest of a substitute.

"This is ours, I think," said Lord Le Pole, coming forward just as Creamy had been claimed by one of her "reserves," and holding out his arm to Judy.

The music, a waltz, struck up ; there was no time for a word, and the questioning timid look she hazarded was to eyes gazing coldly at the bright scene.

They were perfect dancers, but they might have been marionettes as far as the sentient quality of the motion was present to either. Yet with her little hand clasped tightly in his, her golden head against his shoulder, touching it ever and again, and his arm encircling her slight figure, Le Pole for a passionate moment felt he would be content thus to die ; and Judy, his breath fanning her cheek, the touch of his hand, cold and careless though it was, thrilling her troubled breast, Judy with a great yearning wished they could thus float out together on the stilly night, away to some

“ Isle unknown,  
Where they might live, love, die alone.”

But the music ceased, and they awoke to cold life again.

They walked round the room, greeting acquaintances, exchanging light nothings with the gay and careless, making an idle remark

to each other now and again, but not once looking each other in the face. Again the band summoned the dancers, this time to a lively polka, and when the gay strains ceased Le Pole placed his partner beside her mother, taking leave of her with an indifferent bow.

“Wherever is Mr. Rawson, Judy?” said Mrs. Aylmere, “every one is talking; perhaps Sir Janitor has had a fit. Miss Prance says he was seen walking on the beach last night; he wasn’t at the Lodge, was he?” and she looked with sudden suspicion in her child’s face.

“Mother, you torture me,” said Judy, her heart bursting.

Mrs. Aylmere was for the moment appalled at the agitation Judy displayed and which she vainly strove to suppress, but she was wise, and forbore further questioning for the present. Silently she slipped a vinaigrette into her child’s hand, and began fanning herself so that the air evoked should cool the heated cheeks. Then Judy was claimed for the next dance. As on her partner’s arm she passed away, she heard her name linked with that of the absent member for Oxminster. Standing aside, after

the first two or three rounds of the dance, she saw Creamy posing against a pillar ; her back was towards her, and by her side, looking into her great languishing eyes as if there were no other object to him in that glittering throng, was Lord Le Pole. She stood fascinated, wondering if whether or no her heart would break, if it were quite true what Sybella was always saying, "That men, men of the world, make amusement out of simple girls ; that once they had won a heart they ceased to value it, and that it was their pride to show their power." She wondered all this and in pain. Then she heard her own name whispered by Creamy—a whisper in a crowd travels further than words spoken loudly—accompanied by a little jeering laugh, which — yes, she was sure of it—Le Pole echoed. Her eyes lit up, her bosom swelled. Le Pole looked round, their glances met, hers hot and defiant, too proud for reproach, his coldly contemptuous, and yet his heart misgave him, for her lips trembled, and he saw it, and again her soft young cheek blanched.

Just for a second the thought flashed

through her brain, "Could it be, could any one have whispered to him untruths about her, and—and Ned?" And simultaneously, too, the thought rushed on Le Pole, "Could it be possible, could he have misjudged her? She looked so strange, and the triumphant lover was not there." Only for a fleeting second the yearning sympathy going insensibly out from the hearts drifting asunder mingled with restraining force, only a second, then

"You are too slight and fickle," he said, "to trouble the heart of Edward Gray."

"There are no tricks in plain and simple faith," she said, pride swelling in her indignant heart. But pretty Judy Aylmere was the belle of the ball. Neither the magnificent Catty nor the great London beauty could hold their own against the freshness and the bloom, the exquisite sweetness of the young girl unblemished by the world. And in all that gay assemblage there did not seem a lighter heart. Poised on pleasure's wing, "a gay little rover," she flitted from partner to partner, from dance to dance, her eyes sparkling and her lips alive with smiles and wit.

The squire followed her airy movements with loving eyes; Dulsie and Sybella, too, with mingled pride and affection. Only Elsie of all her friends watched the winsome girl with a doubting heart, only she discovered, with the unerring instinct of a fateful experience, that the brightness and joyousness were but sparks from a smothered fire, which too surely she guessed was consuming her heart.

Almost from the first, by that fateful experience, she had guessed her girl-friend's secret—only guessed, delicate natures like Judy's are not given to gushing confidences—and had seen with gladness the pure bud of love opening to perfect bloom. She had recognized, too, that Le Pole was worthy of her in a way that Ned could never be, yet by no unworthiness in himself; and that night she had seen, with quick intuition, the blight descend on the bloom.

She saw her, as if for the moment dazed, sitting the dance so many begged in vain. Then the pale bewilderment with which she rose when, coldly indifferent, Le Pole claimed

her hand ; the listlessness of her perfect dancing, the hard precision of his ; the wondering, innocent look of suffering, too deep for tear or sigh ; then the sudden rally, the proud flush, the slight toss of the drooping head, and the defiant gaiety which only to Elsie had no ring of heart-joy.

Le Pole saw nothing of this. Jealousy and anger had blinded his eyes. But unknown to himself, by no voluntary action of his outer self, his face was ever towards the part of the room in which she was, and over the music, above the hum of voices, and through the rustle and clang of the passing to and fro, her voice was ever in his ear.

Not so with Judy. With that sharp rally she had *shut him down in her heart*, and lived but for the triumph of her hour.

An archaic quadrille now and again gave rest to the waltzers, and in *l'été* the squire and Miss Le Pole revived the dignified motion of their terpsichorean days. A blue-ribboned steward, inspired by the daring Catty, to whose blandishments he had incontinently succumbed, proposed a minuet to the pair.

He did not see fit to urge his proposal, but with a deprecatory bow sidled into the covert of the crowd. The diamond-spangled eyeglasses elevated on the lofty arch of the lady's nose gave him an unusual sensation of relative smallness, and the squire's dignified reproof—that they were there for their own amusement, not for that of others—a sense of shame and irritation, which made him for the rest of the evening chary of the fascinating Irishwoman.

“Arh! now, you didn't think I was in earnest?” she exclaimed as if horrified at his temerity. “Well, well, you Englishmen are ninnies now. Just imagine any one asking you to dance a hornpipe,” and with eyes full of raking mischief she stepped a pace or two backwards and surveyed the somewhat starched official, who was young and consequential.

Catty was *impayable*. It was diverting to watch the deft cozenage with which she managed her irascible husband. His wife's triumphs had long ceased to appeal to his pride. He had discovered that he was keeping



a brilliant and expensive toy for the idle gratification of those who, not envying him as he had intended they should, despised him, and for the utter annihilation of his domestic life. From the senile admiration which he had called love, and the vanity which had glamoured him into the belief that the young and beautiful woman returned his love, he was roughly awakened ; but Catty had a fascination all her own—she could witch him out of his most savage moods, could make him for the moment believe, against the evidence of his own senses, that the handsome, gallant-looking men with whom she flirted, and who hung over her in a way she did not encourage him to do, were no more to her than she was to them—the idle pastime of the hour—that her real love was his and his only. Then she would wind her arms round his neck, and bend down her head, which towered over his, to his shoulder, call him an old goosey-gander, and kiss him into penitence for his crossness.

“But, Catty,” he said one day peevishly, after such a scene, “it seems to me you always choose good-looking fellows for

your pastime, and always young ones, too."

"Of course, Jonas dear; it would never do to play with fire. Young men don't understand the real thing."

And for the time Jonas was satisfied, laying the flattering unction to his heart that she had found the real thing in him. But she was attentive to him in her own way, and, as if in some sort of compensation, saw to his creature comforts assiduously. What she might drift into she was too thoughtless to fear; her safety for the present lay in the light gaiety of a heart that as yet had not learnt to love.

The squire, at Miss Le Pole's request, presented Judy to her. The radiant girl, through whose brain a train of recent memories dashed—the turret of the Hall and the squire's confidences—glanced timidly in her face as she gave her hand to the keen-eyed old woman, who looked her, as she afterwards told Dulsie, through and through. The scrutiny seemed satisfactory to the venerable lady; she did not level her eye-glasses at Judy. She spoke some kindly words to her, made the squire promise

to bring her to the Manor House, complimented her on her dancing, and then, acting on some gossip which had reached her ear that evening, asked her what had prevented Mr. Rawson from being present.

"I expected him," Judy replied quietly. "I kept the first dance for him."

Miss Le Pole nodded as if pleased.

"He'll be an honour to his country, I am sure," she said, "a man of purpose, not a mooning idler," and she raised her glasses and turned them in the direction of Le Pole, who was devoting himself, as he had done all the time he could spare from his duties as steward, to the lovely Creamy.

"Do you like the country?" she asked of Judy.

With a bright responsive look Judy said :

"Oh, yes, I'm a hedge, not a town, sparrow. I love the country ; but then," she added artlessly, "I've never been much in towns, and I've never seen London."

"Good," said Miss Le Pole, "keep her away from brick and mortar, Mr. Egbert. Cities are soul-destroying and body-defiling ;

they make women of the men and men of the women. ‘God made the country, but man the town.’ ”

Then the squire introduced Judy to Lady Albany, who received her with more than civility—with marked favour—giving her an invitation to spend two days at Marlby Grange. But Judy, shrinking back, refused ; she was going to the Hall soon, she said, and then she hoped to call at the Grange with her cousins, but she could not leave home just then.

Lord Albany was not pleased with what he had been on the alert to notice at the ball. He saw that his son avoided the pretty heiress, and he noted—he was not a deep-seeing observer—that she seemed indifferent. They did not understand each other as, from very palpable signs he noted on previous occasions, he had hoped they did ; things were going against him.

Later in the night Elsie danced with Le Pole. She was, as always, in black. This night she wore silver flowers in her breast and on her dress. They danced their waltz, then strolled into the balcony and stood talk-

ing for nearly half-an-hour. When they returned to the ball-room Elsie was mistress of some electioneering facts, which, before she retired to rest, she noted in a book of memoranda. Only incidentally she had named Judy, and then with some apparently careless words, which, however, made the mark they were intended to make.

“Something has gone wrong with my little friend Judy,” she said.

“Why,” laughed Le Pole with a harsh laugh, “she is the gayest of the gay. She has come out in quite a new light, an airy coquette.”

“Men never see below the surface,” was the reply.

Taking it all in all, it was a very successful ball, the greatest social success Sandycot had as yet achieved. No palpable *contretemps* had occurred, and every one had received consideration. Lady Albany and her daughters had been gracious, and Lord Le Pole an attentive steward. The dresses had been fresh and in the extreme of fashion, not the cast-offs of a London campaign, with the

marks of active service on their facings, and bearing in their *passé tout ensemble* an air of indifference to the company.

Miss Prance, refulgent in vivid gold satin and crimson cacti, ambled and curveted in a waltz with Lord Le Pole, but after the second round, slightly giddy from such eccentric caprioles, the latter proposed a *tête-à-tête* in the little impromptu conservatory leading out of the verandah. Sleek Miss Prance, bridling with exaltation, and installed amidst towering pots of foliage, treated her partner to some particular confidences. From her he learnt that, suddenly reversing his previous intentions, the millionaire city knight had given out that his nephew was to be his sole heir, and that his pride at Ned's defeating a "real nob" in the political arena was so great, he had been heard to say that he should cut him out with the Egbert heiress, that "money should not stand in his way."

Then Miss Prance from behind her fan, with a confidential croak in her voice, asked was it really true that Lord Le Pole was Mr. Rawson's rival in that issue also; to which

Lord Le Pole replied by fearing his taste took a more ambitious direction, that he admired women of presence—Miss Prance arched her glossy neck—and being of an erratic turn of mind looked for some one to check his impulses. Miss Prance smiled as if already she had the reins in her hand.

“My impression,” she said in a half whisper, “my impression is that the young lady flies too high. She went great lengths with Mr. Rawson, that I know for a fact; indeed, I have heard her call him ‘Ned;’ but I rather think she has thrown him over, and ‘between two stools,’ you know. I saw him last night pass my window about nine o’clock with a step like a conqueror, and not an hour later he dashed under it again on his way to the beach like a man off his head. I really was terrified, and I shall be very glad when I hear he is safe at Janitor Hall. Don’t you think a flirt the most odious object in nature, my lord?” to which his lordship replied:

“Not quite.”

The great carriage, with its rough farm-horses, stood waiting at the door of the town

hall, where the ball had been held, for its precious consignment of gems and lace, in the person of Miss Le Pole. It was not far off three o'clock, and it was a twenty miles' drive to the Manor House. Miss Le Pole, wrapped in her satin cloak and soft woollen shawl thrown hoodwise over her ornamental head, came on her grandnephew Le Pole's arm. The succeeding carriage was the Egbert one, and Judy and her cousins stood in the deep porch waiting their turn.

The light had already begun to fade in the fair girl's eyes, and her cheeks had only the faintest tinge of colour to relieve them from dead-white. The air was, if not chilly, just a little fresh, and not a gleam of dawn showed in the eastern sky. There was no outer sound save the distant splash of the incoming tide and the far-away murmur of its waters. Inside, the Sandycot contingent, relieved from the restraining presence of what it termed the "swells," had mustered in Sir Roger de Coverley, and from the merry shouts of laughter, not the muffled peals alone permissible in "good" society, it was evident



they were going to finish up with a jollification.

With cigar in hand, ready for lighting, Colonel Bolton stood beside Judy. He was evidently, as Miss Prance would have said, "very far gone," but it was very doubtful if Judy was aware of his presence. In vain he bent to her ear; all his usually successful blandishments and the battery of his eyes were to Judy as pantomime to the blind; her heart was still and cold within her motionless breast.

"You are tired," he said at last, not a little chagrined.

His voice was natural. She started.

"I suppose I am," and she smiled. "This has been unwonted dissipation for Sandycot."

"Next year," he said sentimentally, "you will not be tired, only *ennuied*; I wish I could be fresh again."

"Next year," she repeated mechanically as the Egbert carriage replaced the cumbersome vehicle which had lumbered off with its valuable freight, "next year; it sounds such a long time, but some hours are longer," and

she bade him good-night, but did not take his offered hand.

Le Pole heard the low, sad words, and his heart smote him. He made a step as if to take the squire's place and hand her into the carriage. Their eyes met ; in a flash all softness vanished, and drawing her snowy hood close under her chin she looked him in the face with cool contempt, and without flurry or haste took her seat beside Sybella.

There was not a more miserable man in Sandycot, or Sandycot's wide country round, that night, than the unsuccessful candidate for Oxminster.

An early train in the morning took Elsie to London, and by the afternoon such visitors as had come for the express purpose of the ball had taken their departure also. Of these only Le Pole lingered. He had accompanied his mother and one of his sisters in a call at Egbert Lodge, but only Sybella appeared. Dulsie was complaining of renewed chill, and Doctor Prance had ordered her to bed. Judy was off on a long ride alone. By the last train he returned to Nettlethorp without again seeing her.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ Married passed redemption.”

THE squire occasionally, and Dulsie most mornings, heard from Mabella. The letters were generally short and for the most part taken up with details relating to the home-farm and the conservatory, with now and then the mention of some visitors. She rarely mentioned her husband. Latterly she had said that he found the country dull.

The time was drawing near for the family to return to the Hall; the squire was uneasy about the crops, which were all cut; he was counting the days for his release.

About three days before that fixed for the giving up of the Lodge to Mabella for her future home, as arranged, the squire received from her a longer letter than usual. After perusing it he put it in his pocket, and bringing his breakfast to an abrupt conclusion crept

silently away to his little study. He had aged much of late, had suddenly, as it were, grown down, and his nerve seemed broken. Dulsie, Sybella, and Judy, too, noted these changes with anxious hearts. They, too, longed to return to the Hall, hoping that his old pursuits would rouse his interest in life and perhaps restore his waning vigour.

This same morning Judy also received a letter with the postmark of Nettlethorp on the envelope.

“Who is your correspondent, Judy?” asked Sybella, who always, when she had the opportunity, examined the outsides of the letters that came by post.

“It is from Peters,” she said. “Gloriana has taken the gold medal;” but she did not offer to give Sybella the letter to read. This would not have passed without remark, but at this instant the page brought Judy a summons from the squire.

“The horse, I suppose,” said Dulsie to Sybella.

“I suppose so. How ill papa looks,” she added. “Mabella’s vile conduct has struck

his death-blow. I suspect matters are not as smooth as honey at the Hall. I'm quite prepared to hear he is a swindler."

The squire was sitting in his easy-chair. He held in his hand a business-looking letter.

"Judy dear," he said as the girl with loving solicitude came close to his side, "Judy, my child, poor Mabella is in great trouble. I want you to go to her ; Dulsie is not able—she is in a critical state with her heart, and Sybella is out of the question—I do not feel equal to it, so I am going to ask you to be my deputy."

Judy's ready kiss assured the old man she would be a willing messenger, but she did not give him the letter she had received from Peters to read ; she contented herself with telling him the contents in part. These were already known to him.

"Major Tyler is in immediate want of two thousand pounds," said the squire. "If he does not get it at once, he will be served with a writ at the Hall. Mabella does not in so many words ask me to give the money ; indeed I am just a little doubtful if she really

wishes him to have it. I fancy, dear, she has had her eyes opened, and is bitterly repenting her folly. But I shall give it. The disgrace of a writ was never known inside the old keep, Judy, and if I can prevent it, it shall not be while I live. But I do not care to trust such a sum through the post. Mabella may not get the post-bag, and as in any case I only recognize her claim on me, I wish to send the money direct to her own hand, and so, dear, I want you to take it, and to-day."

Judy said she would soon be ready, but would cousin Egbert make it right with Sybella? Which cousin Egbert said he would do.

"Grant, the old butler, will accompany you, my dear. He does not talk. If you stay over to-morrow, write to me and give Grant the letter to post."

All this Judy promised to do.

"And oh, Judy," said the old man as she left the room to get ready for her journey, "I have had a letter from Lord Albany. It seems that there was bare-faced bribery on Mr.

Rawson's side at the Oxminster election, and he wishes Le Pole to appeal. He has been busy collecting evidence ever since the ball. I fear his own agent, Rout, sold him. It will be an ugly case. But Le Pole, it appears, is not willing. He does not wish his name mixed up with squabbles, he says. It would be an expensive matter, and as he did not stand on pure conservative principles he could not expect any help from the Carlton Club, though he is a member."

"I am sure," returned Judy, "Ned—that is, Mr. Rawson—did not countenance anything dishonourable. He is such a thorough Englishman, cousin Egbert."

"Yes, he is a fine young fellow, I think ; but, Judy dear, all corporations have their own code of morals, but with so many bye-laws, I begin to think, as Addison says, 'The post of honour is a private station.' Custom, too, that specious word, justifies wide divergence from the simple but hard and fast writing of Mount Sinai; and to the old saying, 'Everything is fair in love and war,' politics should be added."

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“I’ll tell you what, cousin Egbert,” Judy spoke hotly—was there really a wider gap between her soul and Ned’s?—“a man who would cheat at politics, would cheat at cards. They are both games of skill, and if honour is a mere scutcheon, its motto is *sans tache*.”

Judy was on what the squire was wont to call “her high horse.” At such times she was given to some very sharp-shooting, and, some said, was deaf to what they called reason; but Judy was always deaf to the reason her clear insight recognized as sophistry.

The squire smiled as he looked lovingly at the enthusiastic girl.

“I was always of opinion,” he said, “that Le Pole would have won had the fight been fair, or if he had used his opponent’s weapons, but that means money.”

“And,” fired off Judy, “dishonesty. No, no; with him, at any rate, it is *noblesse oblige*.”

She stayed a moment, half turned to leave to get ready for her journey. Her young face had a touch of age in the fret of the



mouth and the knit of the brow, her eyes had a questioning surprise.

“Cousin Egbert,” she said in a strange voice, half pain, half pride, “can birth have anything to do with it all?”

The “all” bracketed the two men she did not specify; she trusted to her cousin’s intuition, which did not fail him.

“Don’t you know what your favourite poet Burns says?”

“ ‘ The king may mak’ a belted knight,  
A marquis, duke, and a’ that——’ ”

“Yes, yes,” she interrupted him, just a little impatiently, “I know no one can make a man honest if he is not so in himself; but if birth has given him a noble name, traditions, and old family property, don’t you think he knows that more is required of him than of the man who is what Sybella calls ‘his own architect’?”

It was the squire’s turn to interrupt, and he did so gently, but gravely.

“By whom, Judy?” he said.

She did not answer; he did for her.

“It is a poor life’s work when the world is the only taskmaster, child.”

Judy went impulsively up to the old man and kissed him; the fret and question gone from her expressive face, which mirrored her heart as a clear lake mirrors the sunlit sky.

“Only one word,” she said, “and then I’m off.”

She was] trying to speak lightly, but the squire saw she felt keenly.

“You don’t believe, do you, that Ned knew of this jobbery?”

“No, I think he was so busy ‘orating’”—he smiled meaningly—“that he had no time to look after his agent. He was fresh to the thing, too, not up to the tricks of the trade; but, Judy”—and he was serious now—“his election bills must have opened his eyes.”

“And then?” she questioned what already her heart had answered.

“Again Bobbie Burns,” he replied.

“‘Where’er ye feel your honour grip,  
Let that be aye your border.’”

Sadly Judy went to attire herself for the journey.

“The prize was great, it was won; his intentions had been honourable; he could justify himself to himself, but he was not called on to suffer for the ill-doing of others.” This, she instinctively felt, would be the argument; to which her heart gave answer, “Better to suffer than to gain by ill-doing.”

Then she wondered, with a sorely wounded spirit, what Le Pole would have done had he been in Ned’s place. She knew people called him a purist, and then she thought a purist a very noble thing.

Before leaving the room she re-read the letter she had received from Peters that morning. It ran:—

“HONOURED MISS,—

“This is to tell you, in hopes I will be the first in the field, as Gloriana has coomed in first at the Show, as was to be expected, but all the same what we all bees proud about. The gold medal’s main handsome.

“But, honoured Miss, I fear as poor little Tim’s havin’ a bad time of it. Giles coomed to me, and ses as how he is no scholard, or

he'd have writ you hisself, he would ; he ses, as he allus does, as the little beast's only varment, but he knows you're set on him a'most as Miss Egbert, her as is Mrs. Tyler now, an' it's on his mind to tell you as there's mischief meant him, meaning Tim ; so, honoured Miss, if it could fit as you could come an' see Gloriana after the Show, which was yesterday, you might take Tim along of you. He bees a rare one at rats, an' he's never kantankerus to them as is good to him, and for the matter of that as is good in themselves, begging pardon, honoured Miss, for any reflexshuns on the family, leastways them as belongs to the family now—more's the pity.

“Your humble servant,

“TED PETERS,

“Studgroom to Squire Egbert.”

“If he does,” said Judy as she thrust the letter into a drawer and locked it, “if he does”—she doubled her little fist—“I'll—yes, by Jove, I will—I'll tear his eyes out.”

Judy, considerably relieved, took her way downstairs.

By the squire's direction Grant telegraphed to the housekeeper, Mrs. Carter, who informed Mabella of Judy's approach.

"Oh, then," said Mabella, "I'll wait till after luncheon to go to Giles' cottage. Miss Judy will be sure to want to see him. He's much better, the major says."

"She may not be here much before two, ma'am. Mr. Carter said it would be just a chance their catching the first train."

"Judy is coming, Geoffrey," said Mabella to Major Tyler, who entered the room as Mrs. Carter left it.

The handsome major was in *deshabille*, and it did not become him. He had, in fact, not long risen. This was the first time Mabella had seen him that day. An old velveteen shooting-coat, braceless trousers, and crumpled shirt composed his attire. His feet were inclosed in tarnished Turkey slippers, and on his head was an equally tarnished gold-embroidered smoking-cap—he had been smoking. A dilapidated air hung

round the entire man ; an *ennuied*, discontented *roué* look stamped his face, which, lacking the auxiliary of make-up, showed tell-tale marks of unsuspected years.

“The deuce,” he said, lounging over to his wife’s writing-table and examining some envelopes lying on the latter. “What’s up? You’ve heard from your father, then. Is he going to do it?”

“Geoffrey, I have already told you I will not allow you to touch my letters.”

Mabella rose and locked the drawer of the table, snatching an envelope out of her husband’s hands.

“It is only menials who pry into other people’s letters.”

“Heyday, my fine lady,” returned the major, coolly catching Mabella’s wrist with one hand, while with the other he forced the letter from her grasp, “‘other people’ indeed! lay down the law, will you?” Throwing the letter down he secured both hands. “Now, Mrs. Tyler, one word for all. I may not be master here yet, but I am your master. I have you hard and fast. Do you

understand?" he gripped her closer. "The law can't help you, all you have is mine, and you are mine *till death us do part.*"

He released her. She was white with rage, but with a strong effort she repressed her anger. The very semblance of civility had long ceased between the pair, but Mabella had a powerful will—she could afford to wait. Bitterly she had paid for the one weakness of her nature, but she had vowed that she only should be the sufferer, that during her father's life she would not distress him by vain repining, she would "dree her weird." She turned to him now, not a tear in her bitter eyes. Since her marriage she had shed more than during her sixty years of maidenhood.

"I am as well aware of the law's limits as you can be," she said, "and I counsel you to keep to them, that is all. If there is anything to be done about this money it must be through a solicitor. I will have nothing to do with your money matters."

He rang the bell.

The footman answered it.

“Brandy and soda-water, and get me a devilled biscuit.”

The servant looked at Mabella as if for authority to execute the major's order.

“If Major Tyler has breakfasted, take what he wants to his own room; if he has not, serve breakfast in the dining-room for him.”

“Be d——d if you do,” shouted the major; “bring it here, or I'll teach you a lesson you won't soon forget,” and he made a menacing step forward.

Major Tyler was six feet high, the footman some five feet ten, athletic and broad. The major's shoulders were narrow, so was his chest. With a cool appraising stare, but apparent respect, the man inclined his powdered head and turned on his heel.

At that instant Grant appeared. The grave old servitor, for one astounding moment off his balance, caught at the handle of the door, and by so doing knocked against the major, who with belligerent intent was hastening after the receding footman.

“Ah, Grant,” cried Mabella, “I'm so glad to see you.”



She absolutely quivered in her endeavour to speak calmly.

“Has Miss Judy come?”

At Judy’s name the major cast a hasty look at his attire and vanished by another door.

After a hasty toilet, which advantageously metamorphosed the outer man, he resumed his cigar and struck across the fields to Giles’ cottage “to bring the little minx,” he said to himself, “the latest intelligence of the dog, that she might be convinced of his solicitude.”

Grant said Judy had come, but had stopped at the low gate, where Peters had been watching for her, and had gone with him to see Tim. She would come across the fields after her visit, which she desired Grant to say should only detain her a few minutes.

Then Mabella asked how the squire was looking.

Grant shook his head, and said he thought the old man had aged greatly of late, adding that Miss Dulsie, too, seemed poorly.

Mabella looked wretched.

“My father has been such a hale man for

his years," she said, "any little change shows more. He will soon pick up when he gets home;" but her voice betrayed how little her belief went with her words. Then, almost apologetically, she continued :

"The major has been so used to a barrack life he has not fallen into quiet country ways yet. He does not understand civilian servants, they are so different to rough soldier ones. It is dull, too, for him here."

"It'll upset the squire terrible," Grant said to Mrs. Carter after his interview with Mabella. "Why, she's lost a good stone, she has, and she's that nervous I thought she'd have plumped down in her chair, only she caught at the table, when the major slammed the door. He'll be her death."

"Not he," cried Mrs. Carter, "Miss Egbert"—among themselves the servants never gave Mabella her dearly-bought "Mrs."—"Miss Egbert has a wonderful spirit. He'll find himself in Queer Street some fine morning. Dignity Mansion's no casual for tramps, Mr. Grant."

Grant nodded grimly.

“He don’t dare to treat her bad, does he?” he asked, involuntarily doubling his fist.

“They’ve had awful high words, they have,” she answered, “and John”—the footman—“he came running to me one day to say as he heard a chair knocked over, so I went up and listened at the door. It was the dining-room, but all was quiet, only now and then a sob like. I waited a bit and heard him go out at the far door, then I made bold and went in, and, poor thing, she *was* crying; but the chair had been picked up and all was orderly. I asked her if she called me; she looked shamed at me seeing her in such a way, but she saw I’d heard something, and she said, not minding my question, ‘as the major was terrible peppery, like all military gentlemen was, and she wasn’t used, she wasn’t, to rough words, but it would blow over, she’d settle down in time;’ and then she said, poor soul, as he had French blood in him, comed of old French counts, and ‘French blood,’ says she, ‘and English don’t always mix well.’ ‘French counts!’ says I to myself, ‘the poor thing!’”

“Mrs. Carter,” said Grant with grave con-

cern, "it's a bad job, it is. You may well say 'poor thing!' She wants to make us believe as her 'lectro-plate's *Guildhall*."

"Never mind," cried Mrs. Carter, "she's lots of spirit left yet. She always was master-some, in a kindly way though, and main proud. If she finds out what he comes from, *ironmongery*" — she lowered her voice — "Tubbs says he'll get his marching orders."

"And," said Grant, "I hope I may live to hear 'em."



## CHAPTER V.

“How many cowards bear upon their chins  
The beards of Hercules and Mars.”

GILES' cottage was not far from what was called the low gate of the Egbert demesne, and Judy, her feet winged by solicitude for the merry and loving little companion of many a frolic and ramble, soon reached it.

Giles had just finished his dinner and was smoking his post-prandial pipe, sitting within his cottage porch. Peters had followed Judy at some distance.

Extinguishing his pipe with his thumb, the old shepherd hastily went out to greet the “little miss,” his furrowed weather-beaten visage grimly joyous.

Judy shook him by the hand.

“Oh, Giles,” she said in not an oversteady voice, “I’m so glad you let me know; he won’t die, will he?”

Giles shook his head.

Judy followed him into the cottage. There, on a soft pillow, lay the little dog. He was stretched full length and his tongue hung out of his mouth. Every now and then a quiver of pain passed over his loins. His eyes were shut, but as Judy's foot crossed the threshold the little stump tail moved.

"He knows me," she said, the tears rolling down her cheeks.

At her voice, with an effort that seemed to strain every fibre of his body, Tim tried to struggle to his feet, uttering a feeble whine, then sank down and lay motionless.

She bent down over him, calling him by every pet term in her vocabulary. She passed her hand with mesmeric touch over his sleek sides; he gave no sign of recognition.

"Oh, Giles," she said, "he is dead."

"Noa, miss," said Giles, "but it'll be a good job when un is, vor hizzelf, poor zowl ov hyn. Un took bad after un vittels yesterday, an', miss, we sent for un, an' I zeed how it vor with a clap o' tha eye, an' vetchd hyn here. I made fitten it vor fits, an' hyn they calls the major, hern huzband, un zes

as it vor noa wonder, as 'im vor ved like a ox. But doantee take on zo, little miss, un ain't zuffering now, un's just spent. O, Miss Judy dear, it bean't right," as the tender-hearted girl's sobs came quick, "un's but a dog, an' many a un I've zeen drattled in my day. There's a many things in the Almighty's world az bees to be put out o' tha way at times. Ern's not loike uz."

"And well for them they're not like us," she cried. "I tell you what, Giles, I'd rather be that little varmint, as you used to call him, agonizing out its life in cruel torture, than the man that did it. Poor little, loving, faithful Tim; he'd have fought a lion for me, Giles," and she bent down and kissed the dog between his ears, which moved in magnetic sympathy. Peters stood behind Judy. More than once he drew his cuff-sleeve across his eyes. The shepherd's wife now brought a cup with some brandy and milk, and Judy with a tea-spoon poured a little into the animal's hot inflamed mouth. It revived him. He opened his eyes and whined in recognition of his loved playmate.

“Perhaps,” she cried, “he’d rally if he saw his house.”

At the word “house” Tim gave a feeble growl.

“Oh, Peters, would you get his house?”

In a second Peters vanished. Judy sat down on a low stool close beside the dog. Giles returned to his seat in the porch, but not to smoke, and Mrs. Giles to her chair by the fire. Once or twice Judy renewed the brandy and milk, continuing the gentle stroking, which seemed to soothe the poor animal. Suddenly he showed uneasiness and growled. Not all Judy’s coaxing and endearments could quiet him, but he was too feeble to do more than growl. Then Judy heard some one talking to Giles; her cheeks grew fiery red—she recognized Major Tyler’s voice, and listened.

“Un’s a’most gone, un woant trouble narra one no more,” said Giles gruffly, evidently in answer to an inquiry.

“Mrs. Tyler would not take my advice,” said the major in a conciliatory tone, “she would feed him on meat.”



“Un’s bin used to it themmin vive years to my knowledge,” was the surly reply.

“I’m very sorry for the little brute,” continued the major, “and I’m obliged to you for your kindness to it; you’ve done all you can, I know,” and he slipped two sovereigns into Giles’ hand.

Giles looked at them, stretching out his rough palm as if it held in it some obnoxious insect. Then with an action of disgust he let them drop at his visitor’s feet. They rolled into a corner and glistened there.

The old shepherd rose proudly, keeping his hat on. “Thou bist a rare wosbird, th’ bist,” he said between his teeth; and then in a raised voice, “When a wants tha zyquire’s guineas, I’ll get ’em vrom hizzelf; but man to man, zir, thucks not tha way I’d zettle scores with tha loikes o’ you.”

The major hearing a foot on the gravel turned round and saw Peters, heated with running, approaching with Tim’s house in his hand.

“The little fiend,” he thought, “it’s better.”

Then he entered the cottage. Immediately after him came Peters.

“Major Tyler!” cried Judy, springing to her feet.

The major turned white, but with what bravado he could muster he staggered up and held out his hand.

Judy looked at it, then with a face of mingled scorn and loathing she deliberately turned her back.

An exclamation from Peters recalled her startled senses. She turned to the dog; it had struggled on to its legs, every hair on its back bristling. No sound for the moment came from him. His poor swollen tongue hung from his inflamed jaws, and it was evident he was nearly blind, but he sniffed eagerly and staggered towards his cruel enemy.

With an almost supernatural scare in his face the major jumped on to an oak chest.

“Tim, Tim, my little darling Tim,” cried Judy.

The dog did not heed, he did not hear her. He had reached the oak chest.

“Give me his house, Peters,” she cried.

“Timothy—Timotheus!”

He gave no sign that he heard her.

“Tim, Tim,” and in her excitement the old tone of command rang out clear and sharp, “some one has taken your *house*.”

The last word struck the highest note, and Tim’s spirit came to him with a rush. He turned, growled, and with a desperate effort leaped into his castle.

Judy carried it tenderly to the table. The brave little fellow had fallen over on his side, but with the old action, his forelegs stiff and straight before him, and faint growls, showed he still lived.

Another minute and they ceased.

“Tim, my little man,” Judy cried, “you know me?”

She held her hand to his mouth; he just feebly raised his head, tried to lick the soft little palm, and died.

And outside, lying on the gravel in the sun, Beck and Sam lifted their voices in concert and howled.

Only a little dog lay there dead. To some

it had been a very disagreeable dog, and when the circumstances under which it died had been partially forgotten, there were many who would own to a feeling of relief. But to close observers of canine nature, and to lovers of the race like Judy, a dog like Tim possessed a distinct individuality and qualities that brought it within the range of human psychology. Whence came its faith, its loyalty, its devotion, its keen insight into character, its abhorrence, as in the major's instance, of a foul human soul? Whence, too, came the wonderful intelligence?—how far removed from reason who could divine?

As Judy stood beside the “unconsidered clay” of the being that, denied human obligation of life, had yet paid the penalty of life—death, her heart rose up in rebellion against man's arrogant assumption that for such existences there is no compensation. What, how, when, where, not even imagination could shadow forth. All she felt, all she stanchly maintained, was that nothing was ever formed to be destroyed, and that He who gave even a dog the instinct—to call it by no higher name

—to discern, if but in part, between good and evil, had an ulterior purpose beyond man's finite ken.

Far beyond the doctrine of mere psychism her reverent soul soared. That she intuitively discerned to be materialism, for if it were a universal soul that animated all living beings, it was that, and that only, that regulated their actions, and not the individual organization. That would be to subjugate spirit to matter. And so her first keen pang, as of actual bereavement, had in it the unconscious recognition of a higher claim on her affections than that of a purposeless physical automaton.

Just for the first bitter moment Judy gave way to a burst of weeping, then suddenly turning round she walked up to the major, and placing herself right in the doorway intercepted him as he was slinking off, Giles and Peters beside her. The light fell full on his face, which was white with fear. Her little hand was clenched, and her eyes, through tears, danced in fire.

Beck and Sam had drawn up to heel beside

Giles, and now stood growling and threatening.

“You dastardly coward,” she cried, “it was your hand that did it. The little, trusting, helpless dog—you were afraid of him because he saw into your base soul. You cruel fiend, I’ll never touch your hand, I’ll never lay down my head under the roof that covers yours, and when cousin Egbert dies *I’ll tell Mabella*. The brave little heart”—she dashed her tears aside; “but you *have* gained a victory, a living cur is better than a dead lion.”

White with rage the major raised his hand as if to strike. Giles and Peters closed in.

“It is a lie,” he gasped.

“Out with you!” she cried, stepping aside to let him pass, “and be quick or——” She stooped and caught the two collies each by an ear. Giles gave an involuntary grunt of assent, and the dogs with a deep bay sprang forward, but her hold was firm, and at a “Down!” from Giles they dropped to the floor.

“Out!” she cried again, and with a scream of terror the major fled.

Judy did not undeceive Mabella regarding the cause of the dog’s death. She allowed her to believe it had died of apoplexy. But no inducement could make her rest at the Hall that night. She insisted on returning to Sandycot by an evening train. For two hours she and Mabella held confidential converse, in which the latter told her relative all that was in her soul, and was not a little comforted by the brave girl’s words of cheer and hope. It was agreed between them that Mabella should go to London next day, accompanied by Mrs. Carter, but unknown to Major Tyler, and that she should consult a solicitor about taking up the bill. A slight difficulty as to what solicitor arose. The one who had for years been employed by her father, she said, was out of the question. She could not so humiliate herself, it must be a stranger.

Judy suggested Messrs. Raymont, Rout and Rally. Mr. Raymont, she said, was much esteemed by Lord Albany, and to him Mabella determined to go.

In a fortnight, perhaps less, the squire and his daughters were to leave Sandycot for the Hall, when Mabella was to take their place at the Lodge.

“And, Mabella dear,” said Judy, “perhaps when he finds that no advantage can come to him except through you, things may go smother. He has paid some visits with you, has he not?”

“Yes, and he made himself most agreeable. There is one comfort to me through it all, that he is a gentleman by birth. I suppose Frenchmen make very indifferent husbands, and he has a great deal of French blood in him.”

Mabella spoke as if she were arguing herself into belief against conviction.

“Did you go to the Grange?” Judy asked hesitatingly.

“Yes”—Mabella was too absorbed in her own affairs to notice the flush on the girl’s cheek—“Lord Albany was civil to him, but no more. He got on, however, with Lady Olivia capitally, they seem to have a great many mutual acquaintances; he has been so much in society, you see. But the country is quite



empty, it has been very dull work. However, Judy, I am not going to sit down and lament my fate ; I mean to make the best of it while papa lives, at any rate. If only I can keep things quiet ! For his own sake one would think he will keep up appearances before the world ; *that is all* I ask of him, all I want of him, for oh Judy, Judy, I have made a terrible mistake."

"I think," said Judy, "you ought to have some one to live with you ; it would be a protection against his temper in every way indeed."

"I daresay Dulsie will stay a good deal with me, she is so gentle and good-humoured."

"Dulsie has been very poorly of late, she complains of her heart a good deal."

"Ah, she has done that ever since that rheumatic fever she had, you remember."

"She has been worse lately, Mabella. Cousin Egbert wants her to consult a London doctor, and I think she will. She misses you sadly."

The major did not appear. The footman, on Mabella's questioning him, said he had gone out riding and had left word he would not be home until late, that Mrs. Tyler was

not to wait dinner for him. So Judy and Mabella had early dinner together in peace. After dinner they proceeded to Giles' cottage, laden with flowers from the conservatory and garden.

By Judy's direction a deep hole had been made under a venerable oak-tree, and there poor little Tim was buried, house and all. He had not been ejected even by death. Judy covered him with flowers till the house could hold no more, and then it was lowered down on a bed of fragrant exotics, and covered in by many a rare bud and bloom. Judy stood till the turf had been replaced and all trace of the burial had been removed. She then, with many a pitiful tear, carved his name and date of death on the trunk of the tree.

Mabella had watched the innocent loving girl with sad eyes, but hardly for the dog's death, for her own troubles seemed to have blunted her feelings. Perhaps she insensibly felt that one great and constant cause of irritation to her husband was removed; but her heart was very sore in a dumb way, and she wished she had left her faithful little friend

at Egbert Lodge. After a hasty visit to Gloriana, Judy took her departure for Sandycot. At Nettlethorp she telegraphed to the squire to expect her home that night.



## CHAPTER VI.

“That which is won ill will never wear well,  
For there is a curse attends it which will waste it.”

MR. ROUT was a bachelor. It was popularly supposed that he had never succumbed to the tender passion, though on more than one occasion he had shown symptoms of the malady. His cure had always been effected at the critical point when expectations of the momentous question were indicated. But Mr. Rout was no longer susceptible to feminine allurements; he had no time, he said.

Very much at his ease, his day's work over, Mr. Rout lived in his freehold villa, the Pines, at Clapham. It was a very comfortable villa, inclosed in a high obscuring wall, with an extensive garden, greenhouses, and good stabling. A first-rate cook and housekeeper and two servants, one a man, made up his establishment. Mr. Rout very seldom saw company. When he did, in the shape of a big dinner or

a *recherché* supper, business ends were to be furthered. Hospitality pure and simple was never exercised by Mr. Rayment's partner.

But Mr. Rout had refined tastes. His collection of old china was unique, also of rare manuscripts and scarce editions of books. He had, too, some valuable pictures. The furniture of the Pines was not modern, it was antique, and in the *bric-à-brac* market of money value. Everything Mr. Rout had, possessed a money value.

There was, however, one room in the Pines that was up to date in the matter of furnishing, and a very elegant, beautiful room it was. So also was the bedroom which opened out from it.

A great artist of the day had painted the panels, and a high art decorator had finished the ornamentations. Satin stuffs, velvet-pile carpets, downy cushions, and pillowy lounges told of unsparing lavishness. But nothing smacked of the upholsterer. Exquisite taste fitted things to each other, blending colour and design.

These two rooms were not often occupied,

and then for limited periods at a time, and by a lady. To-day preparations had been made for the arrival of their tenant, Elsie Eber.

Mr. Rout came home sooner than usual, bringing with him a basket of fruit from Covent Garden.

He dressed carefully for dinner that day, and the somewhat sombre sumptuous rooms had over them all a festive air of expectation. And yet the coming guest was but a sister—Mr. Rout's step-sister. They had owned the same mother; but except in affection the brother and sister had nothing in common.

Abram Rout was the elder by some fifteen years. A clever business man, with keen acumen, he yet was uncultured, understanding only the money value of art and literature. But he knew in both what made success. In the conduct of his two flourishing papers it was he who had chosen their editors, he alone who had organized their economy, and he who virtually held the tiller. He knew the popular taste. It was characteristic of Mr. Rout that he never asked advice of any one,

he was essentially self-reliant and very seldom made mistakes, never glaring ones. If he had been connected with some doubtful transactions his name had not transpired. Mr. Rout, in action, was always *cap-à-pie*.

Only one person knew him thoroughly, though more than one were doubtful, and that was his half-sister Elsie.

All the affection of which his nature was capable was centred in his beautiful and gifted sister, and yet he was aware that she read him closely.

The passionate temperament of the mother she had inherited; Abram, like his father, was cool and calculating, with no passion save that of money-getting.

He had, however, a sybarite soul, and lived luxuriously. Passion, genius, beauty, independence—fateful possessions in woman, perilous equipments for the battle of life, where there were none to guide or restrain. Elsie had chosen her own career, which being utterly opposed to that her brother would have had her follow, they drifted amicably asunder, but meeting as occasion served, and

keeping up an affectionate, and, on Elsie's part, confidential correspondence.

And as wealth increased with Abram he made a "bower," as he expressed it, for his only love, his sister. And there, whensoever her spirit failed, or her heart grew weary, Elsie found rest for the sole of her foot.

No one was ever allowed to occupy that pretty bower, it was kept sacred for the one pure, true affection of Abram Rout's sordid soul.

There was one point of wide divergence between the brother and sister—their faith.

Abram still followed, in considerably modified fashion, that of his race.

Elsie, still jealously claiming for herself the distinctive term of Jewess, had long since worshipped at the Christian's shrine. This had not in any way affected her brother. He was simply indifferent.

Born a Jew, he remained a Jew, only easing his obligations by joining the sect which, still clinging to the traditions of their fathers, allow themselves the broad margin expressed by the title of Modern Jew. But in the whole



matter of the law's obligations, that he was of "Abraham's seed" was all-sufficient for Abram Rout.

Elsie had an almost morbidly independent spirit, and though early in her career she had lost, to within a mere trifle, her comfortable fortune, she had not only never appealed to her brother for aid, she had refused it when with real and loving solicitude he had pressed it.

She had talents, she said; it had been through her own fault her patrimony had been wasted; she would do what others less gifted than she had done, "make her own way," and she did.

After the interregnum of a year's unre-mitted study Elsie Eber came before the public as a dramatic reciter, and gained for herself fame equal to that won by the most favoured actress of her day, and fame of that quality means wealth. But Elsie was not wealthy.

Her unsuspected charities, far stretching and many, kept her reserve fund from acquiring any but the proportions required by common prudence.

Apart from her vocation, Elsie led a life of retirement, spending her leisure with the few friends she had admitted to her intimacy, for it was for Elsie to choose.

Friends in the heyday of her fame were many.

In this way Mrs. Horseman and she had come together, and the years as they swept by but drew closer the bond of their friendship. They understood and they trusted each other.

Many a coveted matrimonial prize of society was laid at Elsie Eber's feet. Many a true heart sought hers, but hers was dead, though they knew it not ; love in that sense had set for Elsie for ever.

Love on her horizon had had a sudden, fierce, eastern dawn, then had come the glare, the glitter, the scorch, and, with the fever-heat still in her blood, the quick eveless sunset and night.

But the essential soul of her higher self had risen triumphant on the ruins of her lower self, and earth held no purer, nobler spirit than that in the fragile lovely embodiment of Elsie Eber.

At last the epicurean meal was ended, and Elsie was alone with her brother. A great lamp with mellow shade lighted softly the luxurious room, glittering with plate and glass, and rich with many a canvas from the master-hands of art.

Wines sparkled on the table, and luscious fruits clustered round an ice pyramid in the centre.

A soft evening air came in from a far window, and in the distance the ring of evening chime and bells.

Abram's toilet was careful, his look placid and satisfied. Prosperity, plenty, peace, alliteratively filled his senses.

"No, Abram dear, to-night," Elsie said; "we will begin and finish our business talk to-night. After that is over we can enjoy each other so much better."

He filled himself a glass of old Burgundy and drained it. He was a temperate man, but to-night what he had drunk would have tried the head of a seasoned toper. If it tried his he did not show it.

"First and foremost, Abram, about this

bill," said Elsie; "how has it ended? I see you paid the two thousand to my credit at Roult's. I left Sandycot rather abruptly, intending to come direct here, for I have matters of moment to speak to you about, but I had to meet urgent appeals from Glasgow, some hospital they want to build, so I went there and was detained beyond my calculations. Mrs. Tiler died, you told me, but your letter was hurried, so you gave no particulars."

Abram briefly recapitulated the circumstances of the bill as narrated to him by the major's sister.

She made no remark, did not seem surprised at the baseness and dishonesty, not to say cruelty, of the transaction. She only said :

"Then he paid this man Davis to hold the bill over. He spent the two thousand at Monaco of course?"

Abram nodded.

"And latterly he has kept Davis quiet by Miss Egbert."

"Yes, but Davis will wait no longer; by

this he has served a writ. I suppose Mr. Egbert will pay?"

"Yes, without doubt. The marriage is a terrible blow to the family."

"I thought, Elsie, you would have interfered in time. Do you not think you ought to have done so? He'll have it all his own way now, the dastard."

"I was too late, Abram. I had made up my mind to expose him. He had some such idea, I think, for his statements made Miss Egbert positively rude to me, and I am sure that it was that dread made him persuade her to marry him in secret. Some wonderfully ingenious fabrication; poor woman, what a waking!"

"Do you mean to let him alone now?"

"For the present, or until a necessity for my interference arises. It would be a dreadful ordeal, Abram."

"I wouldn't," he said. "She has plenty of friends to protect her. The squire is no fool. I wonder he didn't try it on with pretty Miss Aylmere. She is to have the property

eventually. But I suppose he could not afford to wait."

"Oh, dear little Judy?" said Elsie. "From the first she recoiled from him, though she was fascinated by his cleverness and apparent force. She is very unsophisticated"

There was silence for some minutes. Elsie looked careworn and sad. Abram was not at his ease.

"Abram," she said at last, "our paths have lain apart, but you have been a true and a loving brother to me. You have stood by me unflinchingly in my hours of terrible need, and you have never reproached me."

"For what, Elsie?"

"Dear, you know. Had I listened to your warning words, how different my life might have been."

"That is all over and gone, Elsie, and you are young still, and even more beautiful now than then."

"I never had a secret from you, Abram. I have always trusted you, and looked up to you. You value my good opinion, don't you, dear?"

She had slipped from her chair and now knelt at his knee.

"Above everything," he answered in a somewhat faint voice, as his arm involuntarily encircled her waist.

"It is not about *him* I have come to you, Abram," she said, speaking soft and low, "it is about yourself and the Oxminster election. Dear, you must make restitution."

He started, drawing his arm away. She clasped him round his knees.

"Do you ask me *how* I know? It is not in my power to tell you, sufficient for us both that *I do know*. Lord Le Pole lost his seat through bribery; you were his trusted agent. His election bills were moderate, one thousand two hundred in all. Abram, if you do not repay Lord Albany that sum, *I* shall. Money has been your snare. The love of it grows on you. It blinds your sense of honour. It will lead you into some terrible pitfall some day. Oh, brother darling, draw up in time. Listen to my warning, though I would not to yours; oh, darling, let me save you from yourself. Hush, Abram," she continued,

catching his hand and holding it tightly in her clasp, "you know my strength of will of old. What I have said I will do. I have no one in all the wide world but you. Friends, loving friends, I have, but only one brother, and you know too well I can never own a nearer tie. I am cut off from any bond closer than a brother's. If you fail me, I shall be desolate indeed."

Again she wound her arms round his knees, looking up into his face with mournful, pleading eyes.

"What would you have me do, Elsie?" he faltered, averting his eyes.

"Abram, which do you love best, me or your money?"

He was not a demonstrative man, nor of a loving nature, but he was a man of one dominating affection, that for his sister. And the very concentration of that affection, excluding as it did every other object, gave it a force unknown to love, however strong, divided among many.

"Elsie," he whispered, "you can do with me as you will."



She rose and brought a blotter, with pen and ink. No more words were spoken, but Abram Rout signed a cheque for one thousand two hundred pounds and placed it in his sister's hands.

A few days later Lord Albany received notice from his bankers that a sum of that amount had been placed to his credit by some person unknown. A letter inclosing the money, in Bank of England notes, had been given in at the door of the bank. The letter was in no name. And Elsie never told her brother how much of the transactions relating to the Oxminster election had come to her knowledge. A very sensible portion of the wrong done had now been repaired, and though personally her magnanimity would have carried her to the height of full and perfect restoration, regardless of consequence to herself, it stopped short at jeopardy to Abram. Her brother was Elsie's vulnerable point.

"Lord Le Pole is going to petition, Abram," she said, resuming her seat.

"We have received no intimation of it," he said sharply.

“He told me a fortnight ago that his father was bent on it. They have been collecting evidence at Oxminster.”

“*They* have been collecting evidence,” he repeated in a husky voice. “Why, Elsie, we were their agents; they would naturally employ us. You are misinformed.”

“No, dear, I am not. They do not mean to employ you.”

“Has Raymont heard this?”

“I do not know, Abram,” she whispered; “I would retire from the firm. You are rich enough.”

“Money has nothing to do with it. You would not have me plead guilty before I am accused. I may have been half-hearted in Le Pole’s cause, for I am a liberal, out and out, but—but——”

“Better you should retire,” she said quietly, “at your own instance than Mr. Raymont’s. The terms of your partnership allow of your doing so at any time, even without notice, do they not?”

“Six months’ notice,” he answered faintly.

“Or a forfeit?” she added pointedly.

"One thousand," he said.

"Abram," she continued, "you must pay the forfeit, and you must take your name off the roll of attorneys."

A servant brought in coffee. She drank hers gladly. It was *café noir*, and it gave her the stimulus she needed.

"Elsie, what have you heard?" he began, trying hard to assume a look of astonishment; he only succeeded in looking bewildered and dismayed.

She bent towards him and kissed his brow, leaving her hand in his.

"My brother," she whispered, "my beloved brother, there can never be anything but love between you and me. *I* can never see you but with eyes of love. It is your head, not your heart, that is at fault. We have been too much apart of late years. My profession is beginning to pull upon me, I seem to long for rest; for, dear, I am not so strong as I was. You are rich. I am independent. I want you to leave England to come with me to Italy. We can buy a beautiful home there on the Arno, or anywhere you may choose,

and I will be always with you. You said you loved me better than your money. I will never hear *his* name there, and you, dear, you will be honoured and trusted, for you will be good and true away from this soul-destroying money-getting. You have been too much alone, Abram."

She spoke with her eyes on the ice pyramid, as if curiously watching its slow decrease. Some warm drops fell on the hand that lay in Abram's, and she remembered a day, ten years ago, when such drops fell quick and many on a pale face from which all the freshness, the joy, the hope of youth had been dashed at one blow—her face. But she did not flinch now. Her love for her brother was fixed in her resolution to save him from himself; for this she would sacrifice the calling so congenial to her nature, would expatriate herself, and cut herself off from the friends she loved. No half measures could save him, and though she shared the pain she inflicted, she did not spare it.

She waited motionless. She knew a violent struggle was going on between mammon no

the one part, fear and love on the other. It seemed to her as if she could follow the tortuous reasoning, as if she were looking into her brother's naked soul. Perhaps she was. The spiritual part of a human soul has a vision beyond mental ken.

But the victory was to be hers. She never doubted it. Sitting calmly there she felt, as she recognized it in all its strength, her occult force mastering the recalcitrant opposers. Gradually his hand grasped hers firmer ; electric sympathy and strength passed from her soul to his. She returned the pressure gently. Had her fingers speech ? He grew calmer and very still.

"Elsie," he said at last, clearly and without a quiver, "look at me, dear."

She did, with a smile of proud trust and love.

"I will do what you wish."

That was all he said. She had conquered. As if by tacit agreement the subject was dropped, and Abram never knew the extent of his sister's information regarding the nefarious transactions of the Oxminster election.

Next day he paid the forfeit in lieu of the six months' notice to Mr. Raymont. It was received without one remonstrating word, without one expression of regret. Whispers, soon to become compromising facts, had reached the senior partner's ears, and Mr. Rout's timely resignation fortified the position of the firm, soon to be on its defence for wilful and corrupt misdirection of its client's, Lord Le Pole's, election contest. Simultaneously, and at his own instance, Abram Rout's name was removed from the roll of attorneys-at-law. A few days later Messrs. Critchell & Co., Tiger Court, Swift Street, London, advertised for sale two valuable literary properties, one a weekly organ of uncompromising liberal principles, the other of moderate conservative tenets. The first was the *Oxminster Weekly Sun*, the second a bi-weekly county paper representing the agricultural shire of S——. The properties were eminently marketable and soon found purchasers, and it may be mentioned here, though in advance of our story, that on receiving from Messrs. Critchell & Co. the very handsome

cheque that represented the purchase-money of the *Oxminster Weekly Sun*, Mr. Rout experienced a strange and involuntary mental conflict, which called to life the antagonism of that hour with his sister, which had resulted in reparation and renunciation. His legal mind was used to weigh both sides of a knotty question. To-day it was at fault. There seemed plenty of argument for the one issue, nothing but the iteration of a fact for the other. For the one, Sir Janitor was as cute as he, Abram Rout, was. The thousand pounds over and above the value of the *Weekly Sun* represented value on another count—that of immediate influence over the Oxminster electors. “Immediate,” yes, that was the count that had nothing to do with the actual value of the paper itself. And Sir Janitor had got the worth of his money. On the other, what did that thousand pounds represent? His honour. That was the one fact no argument could sophisticate away. Did Elsie know? He thought not. The transaction had been between man and man, and it was not likely Sir Janitor would betray himself.

But a "scrutiny" such as was imminent in the Oxminster case was sure to be crucial, and there was no telling how things might turn; and if it did leak out, how proudly he could point to reparation if he repaid that thousand *now*. Was he Quixotic? Elsie was, just a little. Again, how could he do it? Sir Janitor would not understand his real motive—he would be suspicious of a trap, or think he was mad. He *had* got the worth of his money, every penny of it; but for him, Abram Rout, Rawson would not have won, or at least with a very narrow majority. Sir Janitor had not been defrauded, many an election had cost thousands more, and there had been no picking holes. And after all what was a thousand pounds to the millionaire knight?—he would have made it two thousand if it had been demanded.

There had been little money on Le Pole's part, and his hands had been tied. He had been put also to much personal expense not entered in the bills. This thousand pounds represented—loudly rose the inner voice (it had Elsie's tone, it seemed to him)—it repre-



sented *his honour* ! He would make reparation, would refund the same namelessly ; that would do, and then he could meet Elsie's clear searching eyes without quailing. *His honour* ! Abram Rout's chest swelled, he threw back his shoulders. Virtue was a delightful sensation ; he would turn over a new leaf now, with his good angel, his beautiful well-beloved sister, at his side.

Then the eyes of his soul, waking from their dimness, glanced back at the leaves he had turned down in the record of his life, and with an absolute shudder the man recognized the bitter truth, that though money could stain honour, it could never make it clear again. Still at its behest Abram Rout paid back in Bank of England notes, without word or sign to indicate the quarter from which they came, the thousand pounds that had risen in judgment against him. When he had done that he shut down the window of his soul, and he said to himself, as if afraid of himself, "I shall not have a penny left."

## CHAPTER VII.

“No earthly clinging,  
No lingering gaze,  
No strife at parting,  
No new amaze,  
But sweetly, gently,  
He passed away  
From the world's dim twilight  
To endless day.”

MR. ROUT had not been long in his office the morning following his conversation with his sister (he had come to town later than usual), when he was summoned to the senior partner's room. There he found an elderly lady, a stranger ; it was Mabella

“Mrs. Tyler has come about that bill, Mr. Rout,” said Mr. Raymont. “I thought it had been arranged. You had the conduct of the matter.”

Mr. Rout explained. Mabella listened, not a little puzzled at first. Gradually she began to see light, and as it came clearer she showed an increasing agitation.

“Mr. Rout,” she said at last, “would you kindly tell me the whole story without reserve? You seem to know a good deal about Major Tyler. In that you have the advantage of his wife.”

And with certain reserves Mr. Rout did so. He took up his tale from the point of the bill’s history, and in substance told the major’s wife the whole transaction as narrated by that gentleman’s sister on the night of their mother’s death.

Mabella was a woman of determined will and strength of mind, or she had not sat so calmly through what was to her simply a series of shocks.

Then she said, when Mr. Rout had ceased: ‘Miss Eber never held the bill, nor her brother either?’

“Never.”

“How did she come to know of it?”

He told her. Then came the question he had dreaded.

“What was the connection between Major Tyler and Miss Eber?”

“A foolish engagement when Miss Eber was only a little over eighteen.”

“One more question, sir. *Did* he marry the woman, his colonel’s wife, with whom he ran away?”

“Madam,” said Mr. Rout, restraining himself with an effort, “she was not his colonel’s wife; she was the young wife of one of the junior officers, and he did not run away with her. The intrigue was discovered. She was not eighteen, I believe, and her husband turned her out of doors. Major Tyler refused to open his, it would compromise him, he said; but he offered to find her a protector. She tried to commit suicide—threw herself into a river, but she was saved. Her husband divorced her, and the officers of the regiment forced Major Tyler to marry her. He had to exchange; they went to India, where she died. That is the story.”

“Was it after this—this occurrence—or before that he met with Miss Eber?” Mabella asked.

“After.”

“Was his wife alive?”

“She was.”

“Thank you, sir.” She took from her purse the cheque her father had sent for the two thousand pounds and handed it to Mr. Raymont.

“You will arrange the matter, if you please,” she said, “and let me know what I am in your debt.”

“Are you quite determined to retrieve this bill, madam?” asked Mr. Rout in a tone of remonstrance.

“Pardon me, Mrs. Tyler,” said Mr. Raymont, interposing before she could reply, “but have you any means independent of your father?”

“I had; I have none now.”

“Do you mean they are all spent and gone since your marriage?”

“All, and since my marriage.”

“Then the law gives your husband no claim on your father. You had better let it take its course in this case.”

“Sir,” she said, speaking with mingled shame and pain, “the name of Egbert is worth two thousand pounds. It would kill

my father to see it connected with such a transaction. We have never before had dealings but with honourable gentlemen."

There was nothing more to be said, and Mabella, keeping up her dignity to the last, departed.

When she was alone in her room at her hotel—she was not to return to Nettlethorp till the morning—she sat down to take counsel with herself.

The time for tears and regrets had passed with Mabella. After nearly an hour's silent communing, an hour that added lines to her mouth and furrows to her brow, she rose briskly and ordered a brougham to be in readiness in half-an-hour. She had shopping to do. On the morrow she would return to the Hall and bide her time. She would wear a mask, but that would be easy now; it was only the heart that made the face a tell-tale, and hers was dead—dead at least to the *ironmonger's son*.

Dulsie did not get better. What the Sandycot doctor thought to be a chill was more, it was a sudden failure of the heart's action.

She made the short journey to Egbert Hall with difficulty, but the weather being warm and genial she rallied among her flowers, and Judy took heart of grace and spoke words of cheer to the squire. The rally was only for a few days. She was found one bright morning sitting in the easy garden-chair which Parton had placed for her at the head of her conservatory, a gorgeous cactus-bloom in her hand, clematis and Cape jasmine drooping by her head. Her lips were parted as if in act of speech, but her eyes were closed—closed on the fragile splendours she deemed so fair, to open with a glad surprise on

“The master-tints of heaven.”

All these things were against the squire. His strength was no longer that of hale old age; he was sensibly feebler, and his spirit within him was quenched. Not even Judy could win a smile from him. But it was on her slight young arm he leant at the solemn service for the dead, held in the dim religious light of the old chapel. He was not with the dear dead daughter. Back to his fancy had

come that other face which thirty years ago had lain so sweetly still in the shrouding linen beneath the half-closed lid of the oak coffin.

“Only a few years,” he had whispered then; “only a few days,” he whispered now.

And when the sad train of mourners issued from the arched doorway, the “rolling organ harmony” swelling up and blending with the voices of little children in the Resurrection Hymn, in spirit still he was following the one love of his faithful life to her silent niche in the dreary vault. It was not that he did not grieve for his child, or that his fatherly love had waxed cold, but the foot of death had awakened to keen life a thousand sweet and bitter memories, crowding out the sorrows of to-day, of one memory that told of a bond stronger than the dearest tie of blood, signed and sealed in heaven, and so indissoluble in time and impervious to the cancelling of death.

“He is stunned,” said Sybella; and then she took comfort again that it was on her and Judy’s arms he had leant as the coffin was lowered to the vault, and that he had shrunk



away from the officious offer of support tendered by Major Tyler.

But she was considerate to her sister in this hour of mutual bereavement, and took inward satisfaction in noticing that Mabella kept close to her side, utterly ignoring the presence of her husband.

Sybella was very quiet and gentle in these early days of sorrow. Whether their influence would have a permanent softening effect remained to be seen. A nature such as hers, if susceptible of strong impressions, seldom becomes pliant of will or tender in deed, and its hours of regret come generally too late, and passing away leave only an increased hardness behind. When death has laid loved ones low, it then

“Takes every failing on our part  
And brands it in upon the heart  
With caustic power and cruel art.  
It shows our faults like fires at night,  
It sweeps their failings out of sight,  
It clothes their good in heavenly light.”

And keenly Sybella felt this,

“Recalling with resistless force,  
And tracing to their hidden source,  
Deeds scarcely noticed in their course.

“Opening her weeping eyes to trace  
Simple unnoticed kindnesses,  
Forgotten notes of tenderness.”

Knowing now

“How such a vexing deed  
Was but generous nature’s weed,  
Or some choice virtue run to seed ;  
How that small fretting fretfulness  
Was but love’s o’er-anxiousness,  
Which had not been had love been less :  
That failing at which she repined,  
But the dim shade of day declined,  
Which should have made her doubly kind.”

And oh, keener than all

“The small neglect that may have pained,  
A giant stature then had gained,  
When it could never be explained.”

It was due to himself, the major had argued, to be present on this family occasion. It stamped his position in the county, so he said to his wife. She seldom answered him now, and never on any pretence entered on an argument. On this occasion, however, she replied :

“Yes, it is only right that the county should know your position.”

But after the funeral the gallant major

took his departure for London. "Business," he said, and Mabella did not question its nature. At her suggestion the allowance her father had settled on her was paid to her monthly, and she had notified to the major her intention of allowing him half its amount. He was forced to be content with this arrangement for the present. For a few days Mabella was to remain at the Hall; Mrs. Aylmere, too, remained.

Soon things resumed their routine. The blank Dulsie made was very sensibly felt. Sybella was softer, and to Mabella in particular, if not actually sympathizing, comforting in a thousand little attentions. But Judy seemed to fade as she moved among them as of old, still with the same cheer in her words, but lacking the old ring in her sweet voice. The country air did not give her back the roses they had accused the sea of stealing, nor did her now quiet rides on Gloriana restore her failing appetite. But she never complained. She was, as ever, ready with heart and hand to help when wanted, for comfort in various degrees was

much wanted among the sad denizens of the old Hall.

In vain Mrs. Aylmere suggested that Judy should return with her to her own home. She was in the receipt of frequent letters from Oxminster, and she became more urgent on the matter as the dreary autumn days lengthened into winter. But Judy could not tear herself from the squire. Every day he became more dependent on her. She had come now to spend some hours each morning in his study writing his letters for him and reading the *Times* to him. Sybella had business proclivities, and with occasional directions from her father she gradually assumed the management of the estate, under the leadership of the steward. This occupied her time so fully that she was seldom at liberty for social purposes until the afternoon tea-hour.



## CHAPTER VIII.

“Leal heart—lied never.”

AFTER the Christmas holidays the Oxminster election case was to come on, and it was confidently whispered that the result would reverse the present positions of the late candidates. Mrs. Aylmere's correspondent kept that good lady well posted up in the doings at Janitor Hall. The old knight had become, since the petition against his nephew's election had been set on foot, unbearably irascible. He was breaking up, the doctor said. His wiry frame, that had for eighty-six years withstood both bodily disease and mental strain, showed unmistakable signs of collapse, under nothing more nor less than vexation of spirit.

Worldly matters had gone well with Janitor Tomlinson. Only once during his prosperous life had he known a reverse, and that was in the result of his sister's marriage. But it had

seemed to him, with his "inborn luck," as he called it, that the one disappointment was to turn up trumps and to crown his days with honour and glory. Immediately on Ned's success he made his final will and testament, revoking all other wills, by which a needy public were prospectively the gainers. By this document Ned was to take with all his uncle's earthly possessions his patronymic in addition to that of Rawson. The knight made no secret of this disposition. He took a pride in giving the importance of accruing wealth to the success his nephew had achieved. After the Sandycot ball he had been cruelly urgent on Ned to bring home his "bride," as he insisted on calling Judy, and with a latent hope in the future Ned forbore to tell him of his rejection. Lord Le Pole was travelling on the continent. Gossip had informed him on all the circumstances of the ball, and it had ever since been a source of regret to him that he had not been present.

But the knight grew impatient, and Ned dreaded the effect the confession of his rejection would have upon him. He could not

put that confession off much longer. He was keen-eyed enough to perceive that his uncle valued him only as a reflecting power, that had he failed at the election he would never have been more to his vain-glorious relative than a poor relation, to be awarded only the consideration demanded by the outside world. Sir Janitor was morbidly sensitive to social esteem. He had beaten a "real live nob," and Sir Janitor, in his exultation, said, "You shall be a real live nob yourself, my lad. Money's the motive power of success. I've the grease and you've the wheels, so go ahead, my boy, and the devil take the hindmost." Alas for Ned, was he to be that "hindmost?" It seemed like it.

The facts of his canvass had come to his knowledge, and with good cause he dreaded the result of the scrutiny. Fortunately for him the sad event at the Hall afforded him a present excuse for not following up his suit with the squire's heiress, Sir Janitor's alternative title for Judy.

Gossip had first informed the knight of the young girl's preference for his nephew, and,

like all one-sided natures, he held to his first impressions, and treated as "trash" the after-whispers that reached his ear of her growing liking for the defeated candidate for Oxminster. But it whetted his desire to see the marriage accomplished, for though he was certain, he said, that the girl was "all for Ned," he thought it was possible that gossip spoke truth in saying that "the nob was going in for the girl." It would be a double victory, a "real right-down, slap-up, no mistake-of-it licking."

The pending petition to come off after Christmas against his nephew's election he had at first treated with vituperative scorn. He was, however, too sharp not to feel that he stood on shaky ground. As facts were pressed on him by his persistent and much-enduring law adviser, he became more and more irascible. His fair name, his reputation, which had cost him in hard cash some hundred thousand pounds, was at stake. He stoop to bribery! He condescend to sell a valuable freehold like that on which stood the "Spotted Dog" for a few shillings! He cozen



over his open enemy's confidential agent, and pay great sums to secure the services of a traitor! He openly break the whole code of honour, even among thieves! Who would believe all this of Sir Janitor Tomlinson, the millionaire city knight, one of the foremost philanthropists of the day? He was not responsible for blundering agents and an addle-pated nephew—Ned had come down the scale with a run. He would repudiate the whole affair and disinherit the “irresponsible fool;” then people would know how he had been tricked. But facts are stubborn things, and there was one fact Sir Janitor Tomlinson could not thrust aside. *Whence came the money?* There was no escape. Rout had returned that thousand, he knew it was Rout; and then he laughed almost fiendishly, “Conscience money from Rout!” There was a trap behind, he was sure of that, but he was “up to trap.” They thought he was in his dotage; why, his head was as clear as a whistle yet—he’d fight them all. And then Sir Janitor, feeling just a little strange in that region which had the peculiar clearness of a

whistle, sank into a chair. He was by himself; and then somehow the furniture in the room, the pictures on the wall, and the blazing fire in the grate all began to move with a downward inclination, and he remembered nothing more.

An hour after Ned found him, a dazed look on his withered face, cowering over the fire. It was broad daylight. The knight insisted that it was "dark as pitch," and called for his lamp. Ned, at once recognizing the signs of sudden illness, sent for a doctor. Fortunately that functionary happened to be in present high favour with Sir Janitor, who with a powerful effort of will retained in a great degree his senses. These told him he was ill, and he felt glad that aid was at hand. But he would not "give in." A little rest would set him all right, and in the morning he would see his lawyer and make another will.

The doctor got him persuaded to retire to bed. When quiet on his pillow the old man, forgetting the presence of Mrs. Peerie, his lady housekeeper, said in a shrill querulous voice :

“Doctor, that beggarly Rawson pauper is plotting to get me out of the way. I’m going to cut him off with a brass farthing in the morning. He’ll be turned out of Oxminster, he will. He’s bringing, as his father did, dishonour on an honourable name. Patch me up doctor; there’s lots of life in me still. I be d—d if I give in;” and his eyes closed in slumber, induced by a powerful anodyne.

There was no chance for the old man, the doctor said, unless he was humoured in every whim. The least contradiction would certainly bring on the fit of which this attack was a warning. His mind, he considered, was off its balance. At present Ned must keep out of his presence, and perhaps things would quiet down, and then he might rally. It was doubtless the worry of this election petition business. The doctor liked Ned, and he determined to delay that threatened interview between Sir Janitor and his lawyer.

And it seemed to Ned as if his sun had gone down at noonday.

Lord Le Pole, with a heart as little at ease, had been for weary weeks on that “bootless

bene," trying to escape from himself. At first, in the company of the fair Creamy and her husband, he had followed with slavish exactitude the prescribed route of society tourists.

At Homburg they had parted, he to diverge in his flight to solitary and, as he found, intolerably dull retreats—mountain châteaux, lake hamlets, and romantic but uninteresting valleys; the Beaumorrises to take up their yacht at Marseilles and go home by the Mediterranean. In his wanderings Le Pole brought up at Nice, where Lord and Lady Albany with their daughters expected him. The night of his arrival, sitting in the verandah of his hotel sipping iced coffee, his eye was attracted by a familiar figure. He had seen so many familiar figures at the various spas at which he had stayed that he felt no surprise, scarcely the curiosity to individualize this one in particular. It came nearer, and it was evident to Le Pole that it had recognized him and sought to avoid him.

Languidly interested, he put up his eyeglass, and with a start exclaimed "Rout!"

But he did not stir. He had heard through his father that Mr. Rout had retired from his profession, but that he had been subpœnaed to appear when the petition should come on. There had been dirty work. Enough evidence had been collected to prove that it would not be difficult to bring it home to the individual chiefly implicated. In a dim way both Lord Albany and his son connected the reimbursement of the £1,200 with Mr. Rout, but Mr. Raymont, to whom the former suggested such a probability, ironically negatived it as an impossibility. Rout, he said, was a Jew without even a Levitical conscience. There was a mystery, and such it still remained. As Mr. Rout slowly disappeared in the direction of the gardens, a lady who occupied a table near Le Pole's, but not within his line of vision, rose and was about to pass him when she suddenly stopped. Her abrupt motion attracted Le Pole's attention; he turned round and with a flush of delight jumped from his seat, crying :

“Miss Eber, I am fortunate.”

Elsie seemed equally pleased at the *rencontre*.

They strolled away together, talking of everything and every place but those uppermost in their thoughts—the events at Egbert Lodge and Sandycot. Nearly an hour they thus sauntered, feeling a placid restful pleasure in each other's company. The night was ablaze with stars, the air heavy with the perfume of flowers. From the distance—they kept apart from the gay crowd—came the sweet strains of the perfect band; a faint breeze fanned their cheeks.

They sat down beside a drooping acacia. Then she asked with delicate interest some questions as to his hopes with regard to the election petition, expressing regret for Ned's probable disappointment.

“Things have gone hardly with him,” she said softly, “and for no fault of his own. He is a true-hearted man; a ‘bonnet blue,’ as the Scotch call it.”

Le Pole made no answer. He was thinking that things had gone very hard with himself.

“If he is unseated,” he said at last with vainly repressed bitterness, “he will easily

find an accommodating borough; he will be a millionaire."

"Sir Janitor Tomlinson is ill," returned Elsie. "His housekeeper, Mrs. Peerie, is an old acquaintance of mine, a reduced lady of equally slender education and means. She has been with Sir Janitor some years now, and manages him wonderfully. I am told his temper is very uncertain—a dreadful old man altogether."

Le Pole listened apathetically; the subject did not interest him, but he was pleased to hear Elsie's soft accents, and an apathetic mood is just the mood for desultory chat. He even wondered who this housekeeper had been, but his curiosity did not prompt him to inquire.

"I had a letter from her the other day," Elsie continued.

Le Pole did not observe that Elsie hesitated, as if from some cause uncertain of her subject.

"She mentioned Sir Janitor's illness. It seems he has taken the petition terribly to heart; it has hurt his pride, she says, and in the most unreasoning manner he threatens to

disinherit his nephew. The doctor has got him persuaded to await the result of the case, but he is so uncertain and capricious he may turn round on the doctor himself and work his wicked will if but to spite them all."

Le Pole shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry for the young man," he said. "I believe he knew nothing of what was doing, but I don't place his political morality above suspicion. However, he will have his consolation," and he smiled a bitter smile.

"How? in what?" asked Elsie.

"Miss Aylmere," he replied.

"Lord Le Pole," she said after a minute's deliberation, "I am going to do a thing which some might deem a breach of confidence, but there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence, and this is a time to speak."

He looked into her clear, earnest eyes questioningly, unknown to himself, with a quickened pulse.

"Miss Aylmere refused Mr. Rawson."

A cold conventional phrase—sudden hope-inspiring, life-reviving words.

"Pardon me," she added—he could not for



the moment speak—"but I guessed your secret long ago, and dear little Judy's, too. Hush, let me say my say. *She* told me nothing, but, my lord, I am a woman who has suffered, and she had no need to tell me. She and Mr. Rawson had been boy and girl together; she fancied she liked him, perhaps called her liking love, but he, poor fellow, loved her as he never again will love in this world. She had made a mistake, and it was you who taught her she had done so. Now I come to my breach of confidence"—she smiled as one about to confer a priceless boon; her lovely face was radiant, and her eyes clear as the stars above. "I was at Oxminster after the Sandycot ball. I saw Mr. Rawson there, and he told me that Judy Aylmere had rejected him. He had gone to her the night before the ball confident and exultant, and—I tell you his very words: 'She said it was all a great mistake, that she did not love me, never had loved me, did not know that I loved her so much, and she kissed my hand in pity.' That was all."

She ceased and turned her head aside.

After a little Le Pole, with a choking voice, whispered :

“ Miss Eber, do you think she will forgive me ? ”

“ Yes,” she replied, “ but her wound is very deep. I have had one or two letters from her, but they were very short, no spirit in them, so unlike Judy. I heard, too, through Mrs. Horseman, that they are anxious about her, and that Mrs. Aylmere wished to take her abroad, but she would not leave her cousins. The squire is breaking fast, that marriage was dreadful, then poor Miss Dulsie’s death.”

She knew the pain her words were giving ; she intended it.

“ I shall never forgive myself,” he muttered ; “ the sweet little, bright darling, how could I doubt her ? ”

“ How, indeed ? ” thought Elsie, but she made no rejoinder. She rose to go.

“ Stay,” he said, “ but one word. There are some resolutions that are made without weighing consequences, one such I have come to now. I shall this night telegraph to my

agent to stay all proceedings in this election petition. I shall desire him to withdraw it."

Elsie's breath came quick. "Can you?" she said. "Is it not too late?"

"No. The informations have not been sworn yet. I am in time. It is a mere matter of paying costs."

"Lord Le Pole," she whispered, "I thank you ; Abram Rout is my half-brother."

\* \* \* \* \*

Le Pole had considerable difficulty in reconciling his father to the course of action upon which he had determined.

"Some absurd Quixotic notion," he said to his wife, to which she replied :

"Notion or conviction, Albany, you had better give way with a good grace, for Le Pole always means what he says."

"He tells me he must leave for home to-morrow," said Lord Albany in an aggrieved tone. "I do wish he was in Parliament. He has been more erratic than ever since his defeat. It is very mortifying."

The evening post had come in. Lord

Albany held a package of letters in his hand.

"These are for you and the girls," he said, giving his wife some five or six, and with a sigh reading the addresses of those he had retained. "Business, all business," he said fretfully; but coming on a square envelope, "here's one from"—he scrutinized the post-mark — "from Nettlethorp — Egbert, I think."

He opened it. It was from Mr. Egbert, and contained only a few lines, traced in an uncertain hand. Miss Le Pole was ill, a sharp attack of bronchitis. The squire had seen her; she had sent for him, and he thought Lord Albany had better return home at once. She had refused to admit Lady Margaret Dredger, who was at the Grange, but she had seen his cousin, Judy Aylmere, several times. Judy had failed in persuading her to allow the doctor to send for a trained nurse; indeed the doctor's attendance was a mere farce, as she said she could doctor herself better than any one.

"We had better go with Le Pole," said

Lord Albany, handing the letter to his wife. She read it, and then said :

“I have one from Margaret ; she says the attack is a very sharp one, and that the doctor does not think she will get over it. Little Ormsby is ill, too. Poor Maggy, she writes in low spirits. He is a fragile little fellow ; I shall be glad to be at home. Miss Aylmere, she says, has been very kind in going to see her. The child is very fond of her ; but, she adds, she—Miss Aylmere—is so changed, and looks as if she were fading away. Albany, do you not think Le Pole may have had something to do with it ?”

“With what, Louise ?”

He had not followed his wife's train of thought intelligently.

“Margaret was positive that she liked him,” continued Lady Albany, following out her mental argument abstractedly.

Lord Albany understood.

“And so was I,” he said. “Some complication with that young Rawson probably. Le Pole wants self-assertion. I am convinced he had the cards in his hands. I should not

wonder if Mrs. Beaumorris laughed him out of it; the 'little rustic,' she used to call her."

"Albany," said his lordship's wife, "you will never understand your son."

But Le Pole did not accompany his family on their homeward journey. He took flight by himself, travelling without an hour's cessation until he reached Nettlethorp. His lady-mother took things more leisurely, though still making, for her, unusual haste.



## CHAPTER IX.

“So cast and mingled with his very frame,  
The mind’s disease its ruling passion came.”

SIR JANITOR TOMLINSON always spoke of his doctor, whose somewhat eccentric patronymic was Bibbleton, as his “medical attendant.” He said Bibbleton was the only doctor who had ever understood his constitution, and he had some sort of idea that that functionary possessed in himself a charm against death. He was in constant request at Janitor Hall, not in his official capacity, but as a kind of pervading influence, a mental anodyne, insuring in imparted security a present oblivion of certain fears induced solely by the excess of years over the limit of man’s allotment, for Sir Janitor’s bill of health was still, what it had ever been, clean. In this way Doctor Bibbleton had obtained over the old knight—a very fiction of a patient so far as business went, his visits for the most part being on a

friendly basis—an influence possessed by no other being. Now that they were on a purely professional footing the old man was as a child in his hands. He knew as a shadowy fact that some day he must pay that inevitable debt to nature, but the bill was so long overdue perhaps he had come to hope that not being presented it had not been noted. But in practical rendering he regarded death in some measure as a disease, to be, if not finally conquered, kept at bay for an indefinite period by Bibbleton's skill and his own fence. He knew he was—Bibbleton had said so—as sound as a rock, not even a tooth gone; he might live to be a hundred, not now an uncommon age. But of course years did tell, and he, perhaps, might be a little more susceptible lately to mental worry. The excitement of the election would have tried a younger man; it *had* tried him, he acknowledged as much to Doctor Bibbleton. His head had at times a strange feeling of emptiness. But he was quieting down, returning to his normal condition, when this most unlooked-for petition had turned up. His nephew was



an ingrate, as well as a blundering fool. That was not the man even to keep money together. He had made a mistake, the one mistake of a triumphant career, but he would rectify it. The moment Bibbleton pronounced it safe for him to sit up he would go into the matter with Fisk, and send Rawson's pauper about his business. But in consideration of what the world might demand, he would settle on him an annuity of two hundred a year. At present he would follow Bibbleton's instructions, lie perfectly still, keep up his tone with old port, and allow his mind to dwell on nothing but what was pleasant.

So the doctor visited him constantly in the day; read to him the money articles of the *Times*, and gleanings from the *Investor*, and salient bits from the *Financier*. His house-keeper, too, kept him informed on what he called the "public feeling" about his illness, which was the flattering gossip of the town, and the indignant *on dits* on the subject of the petition. These last were for the most part manufactured "as necessary tonics" for the patient's recovery.

But somehow that strange sensation of emptiness in the head did not yet get sensible relief, and the interview with Fisk was postponed from day to day. Doctor Bibbleton on more than one occasion put in a good word for Ned, which was received with grim silence, for the knight was crafty and suspicious. He saw that Bibbleton was sorry for the "young fool," and he thought it was just possible that he had been bribed to patch up matters, but he would let him see what an adamant will he had to deal with. Still he would make no bodily exertion without his doctor's sanction: it was clearly the latter's interest to keep him alive.

There was something of the fox in Sir Janitor's nature. A great writer has said, "from the oyster to the eagle, from the hog to the tiger, all animals are in man," and that "each of them is in a man, at times several at once;" and that "every individual of the human species corresponds to some one of the animal creation." Sir Janitor's correspondence was found in the fox; his face, indeed, was of the vulpine cast. Keeping, according

to his regimen, perfectly still, he asked the doctor one morning if he thought he might with safety write a letter. Quite off his guard the doctor said he might, that the pleasurable excitement of a friendly letter might even be of service. Only disagreeable things, he added, had to be avoided.

"Then anything that gives me pleasure is safe?" asked the knight.

"In moderation, yes," was the reply.

"Then," said the old man, his little keen red eyes looking sharply out from their bushy furze at the doctor's bland visage, "I'll trouble you for my portfolio. I want to write to Fisk. What I have to say to him will give me the very greatest pleasure, so you must consider the letter your prescription."

Dr. Bibbleton was a wise man. Without a word he brought his patient the portfolio, placed it before him, propped him up on skillfully arranged pillows, gave him the particular pen he required, arranged everything to his liking, and withdrew, saying he was going to visit a patient at a distance and

would not be back till quite late. Sir Janitor's heart sank. Now that his head was on the perpendicular that strange sensation of emptiness had returned, he felt absolutely giddy. The doctor put in his head at the door as at the prompting of an after-thought.

"If the uneasiness in the head returns, Sir Janitor, Mrs. Peerie will know what to do," and he vanished.

It was a large sumptuously furnished room, with velvet-pile carpet, great mirrors, satin hangings and massive furniture. A blazing fire diffused warmth and cheerfulness, and from the lowered top of one of the three large windows, from which the satin-draped luxurious bed was jealously protected, the cold air came gently in, keeping the atmosphere of the room fresh and invigorating. A bank of down pillows supported the shrunken frame of the old knight. A huge eider-down quilt of crimson satin obscured the attenuated limbs; not even their line was indicated. An invalid-table with an ingenious contrivance held the writing paraphernalia within reach of his hand. An electric bell communicating

with the housekeeper's room was also within his reach. Nothing was wanting to complete the ease and comfort of the millionaire invalid, nothing to make his sumptuous chamber complete. Wealth has its obligations, and the millionaire knight, in unwittingly preparing a guest-chamber for the King of Terrors, had acknowledged one.

As the door closed on the doctor, Sir Janitor's heart sank within him. He left his pen untouched, and placed his shrivelled hand on the electric bell, calculating within himself how long it would take for the doctor to get clear of the house: he would then summon Mrs. Peerie. She would read to him, and he would put off writing to Fisk till to-morrow. Suddenly the sound of bells, many bells, struck on his ear, coming in with the fresh November air through the open window. He listened; it was a peal, like the peal that had rung out the day he opened the hospital, and the day his nephew had "licked" that "supercilious nob Le Pole." "A peal," he grinned spitefully, "it ought to be a muffled peal," and then the thoughts his own fancy

had suggested made him groan as in utter and helpless wretchedness. Still louder and louder on the clear air came the jubilant clang. He would ask what it was ; but just as he touched the bell the door opened, and to his unspeakable relief the doctor put in his head as if to reconnoitre.

“Come in, Bibbleton, come in,” he cried with feeble eagerness. The door opened wider ; the doctor’s head disappeared, only to reappear the next instant over the shoulder of Ned, who, fear and joy struggling on his care-stricken face, and holding a telegram aloft, came up to his uncle’s side, and, not waiting for the impending burst, cried :

“My dear uncle, don’t you hear the bells ? Lord Le Pole has withdrawn the petition, and the town is beside itself. The hospital has your flag flying, the school has a holiday, and the corporation are concocting an address to present to you,” and he laughed.

The news seemed to confuse the old man. He took it in very slowly, but he did take it in, for he smiled and held out his hand to Ned, who, his heart “full of a great relief,” and pain,

too, and the dread the bravest feel at the signs of the last impending change, took it within his own and kissed it.

“Ah,” said the knight in a voice scarcely above a whisper, “ah, Sir Janitor was one too many for them. They’re all alike, them nobs, not a brass farthing among ’em;” he was relapsing into his boyhood’s vernacular, and his hands were picking at the blankets.

The doctor, with a hurried gesture to Ned to ring the electric bell, administered some brandy.

“All right, Bibbleton,” he said, revived by the alcohol, “head’s full enough now, right as a trivet. I’ll give ’em a banquet; drink Ned’s health, Sir Janitor Tomlinson, the great philanthropist’s nephew—three times three and one more.”

His voice seemed to fade away, but his little foxy eyes were as bright as ever.

“Thomas,” he cried in a thin treble, naming an old clerk dead some thirty years, “bring me the day-book; d—n it, lookee sharp, time’s money, an’ them as wastes time wastes money. Run up the last

column, there's sixpence out; d—n it, sir, hurry, or I'll do it myself an' dock your wage."

Fainter and fainter the voice sank, and the hands clutched the eider-down quilt.

"Thomas, what is it I allus ses? Dunno, don't you? No, you never knows nothin'. I allus says a clean ledger and a curreck tot, an' a man may die 'appy."

The breeze with a sudden gyration filled the still chamber with the clang and clash of the jubilant bells; it lifted a grizzly lock lying on the clammy brow and waved it as in triumph. Then the doctor bent forward and closed the lids of the little sharp eyes that, fixed and keen, seemed as if independent of the soul gone to its account.





## CHAPTER X.

“ Ask me no more ; thy fate and mine are sealed.

I strove against the stream and all in vain,

Let the great river take me to the main.

No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield,

Ask me no more.”

ONLY a few withered leaves clung to the more sheltered branches of the trees, not with tenacity of life, but as in lingering love. The breezes had folded their wings in lull of sleep, but now and again a wood-pigeon with a noisy flapping darted from its bare covert, snapped the brittle stalks, and helplessly and lifelessly the sere and yellow relics of a verdant prime fell to the earth. The gray vapours of November hung low on the slope of the downs, the brown meadows and dun waters blending in a melancholy harmony.

It was early in the forenoon as Judy, with a slow, springless step came across the humid fields to Giles' cottage. Within the small inclosure containing the shepherd's holding, and

fringing the outer line to the skirting of the wood, were thick bushes of evergreen, and here and there a slim ash enwrap in ivy. On the far side of the pathway was the brook, now full with the early winter rains. The pool beneath had overrun its brim, and the margin was soft and slimy. To-day its surface was alive with coots and waterhens. They did not flit away scared at Judy's approach. One or two dived, coming up close to the shore as if to show their unconcern. Very listlessly Judy walked. Her sweet mouth had a pitiful line of secret care, and her eyes a far-away mournful look. That look had gone to the old shepherd's heart. There was something the matter with the "little miss." The gossip of the servants' hall, echoed in the stable-yard, had given him an inkling of this "something," and many a time he descried her slight figure ascending the path to the sheltered walks where he fed his sheep, and old Giles unbonneted, as with lifted face, but closed eyes, he offered a fervent petition that He who tempered the wind to the shorn lamb would bring light

out of the darkness that had gathered round the "little miss," and in His own good time make the rough paths smooth to her tender feet.

Often, seated on a mossy stone beside her humble friend, Judy would while away an hour in converse on deep, spiritual things, and often her step as she hastened homewards had in it the spring and lightness it had lacked on its outward course. The girl was bearing up bravely. Her heart and hand she brought to every duty, and never a captious word or murmur escaped her lips. If she was stiller, graver even to sadness, she was as gentle as ever, as loving and as self-forgetting. But Judy's song was hushed, and no one now heard the merry ringing laugh that used to be brave cheer in the old squire's ears, and, whatever her mood, could waken a smile on Sybella's wintry visage.

The squire felt the change, and wondered in a hazy, dumb fashion, but somehow he did not seem to miss her cheer so much; his own spirit had failed him. Evening shadows had long since rolled into night, and night was

now to him but the dawn of day. Judy's mood harmonized with his fading away. She missed Mabella, he thought, and Dulsie, too, but spring would come and Judy would bloom again.

She seemed to-day to the old shepherd's eyes a woodland fay, such as the folk lore of the district told of. Her hair was coiled under a small fur hat, from which it sent protesting emissaries in the shape of little golden flakes and tiny feathery curls, that rose and fell as she quickened her step on sighting the shepherd's cot. A close jacket of the same fur fitted unto her slight figure, and her gown of fine black serge was short, showing the dainty but stout little shoes. She carried a basket containing some delicacy for the shepherd's ailing wife. And always as she crowned the ascent she turned aside to stand a pitiful moment beside the venerable oak beneath which lay her merry little companion, Tim. To-day she only stood on the path, looked across at the spot for a brief minute, and then entered the cottage gate.

Giles was within.

“I am in a hurry to-day, Giles,” she said. “I am going to ride to the Grange immediately after luncheon, and I have come for the squirrels. Peters says he will carry them for me in a basket, but they know me, and I think I’ll take them in my pockets. I am not going to wear my best habit, and my everyday one has two capital pouches”—and she smiled. “The poor little fellow, he will be so pleased.”

Giles touched his hat in token of assent to Judy’s arrangements.

“Have you heard how the little chap bees, miss?” he asked.

“Yes, I heard to-day. He is very feeble, Lady Margaret says. He is always asking when Judy and the squirrels are coming. I wanted the squire to drive with me in the brougham, but he is very low to-day. I shan’t be long away; Gloriana will take me there and back before dinner.”

“Have you heard the news, miss, vrom the Manor House?” asked Giles as he put the squirrels into the soft-lined basket and carefully fastened it down.

“No ; is Miss Le Pole worse ? ”

“She’s goane whoame, miss,” said the old shepherd solemnly. “It vor thick morning at daybreak—her sun zet. A lad with a note to tha zquire coome across the fields thick vay an hour and more agoane, un tell’d me.”

The squire seemed more than usually feeble at luncheon, Judy thought. The death of friends was no longer the pain to him it had once been ; death was more natural now to his seeming, but he always felt the severance of old ties, even though he knew that his “little while” could now be scarcely more than the breath of an hour.

“I wrote to Lord Albany some days ago,” he said, “but I fear he was not in time ; in fact he could not have been.”

“Lady Margaret said nothing about expecting him,” observed Judy, “and her letter was written last night. I would not go to-day, cousin Egbert,” she added, “only the Cricket is watching for me and the squirrels I promised him ; and then, you see, if they all come home, which they are sure

to do, I could not very well go for some time."

"Judy dear," said the squire, "I shall be very glad to be alone this afternoon. I shall miss my eccentric old friend very much. The doctor says if she had listened to what he calls reason—taken his medicine, I suppose he means—she would have got over the attack, but she would treat herself. She had done so before, and with success, she said, but then she was younger and stronger; however, her time had come. The east wind—it is nor'-west to-day—tries us old bodies terribly. Sybella says Sir Janitor Tomlinson is not expected to live."

"Did you hear from mamma to-day, Sybella?" asked Judy.

"No. I had a line from Miss Prance and from Mabella, too; they both mentioned Sir Janitor's critical state. Mr. Rawson is with him, but Miss Prance says the old man won't let him enter his room. It was the election petition upset him first; but he is quite old enough to die of old age."

"Only six years more than mine, Sybella,"

said the squire gently, and then he added, "I hope the young fellow won't suffer. Sir Janitor is very capricious, I believe."

This was to be a momentous day in the story of the two beings fate had so nearly made one, so cruelly severed in thought. Lady Margaret was expecting Judy. She saw her coming up the avenue at a sharp trot, and was in the hall to greet her as she entered. Her manner was a little flurried, but Judy did not notice it. The squirrels had begun to protest against further durance by sundry scratches and little squeaks, and Judy's attention was absorbed in keeping them within bounds in their novel conveyance until the Cricket should have them safe. She was, however, obliged to release them and place them in a basket, which, in anticipation of such an emergency, Peters had carried with him.

The little fellow knew Judy had come. He was sitting up in his cot, clad in a warm flannel dressing-gown of blue, with a white Shetland kerchief, Judy's work, crossed on his breast and tied behind.

"The doctor says he will do now," whis-



pered Lady Margaret to her companion as she ushered her into the pretty boudoir that had been turned into a sick nursery for the treasured child.

“Judy has brought Cricket the squirrels,” she whispered softly as she bent over the eager child and kissed him lovingly, he clasping his small shadow-like arms round her neck.

Then she took the little, soft, tame creatures out of their warm cot, and first scattering a handful of nuts and sweet biscuit on the counterpane of the cot she put them in the child’s lap.

With infinite delight he clapped his hands and tried to shout “Hoorah !” but only succeeded in uttering a thin little cry. He was a brave little fellow, weak and wasted though he was, and showed no fear when the squirrels in their gambols perched on his shoulder.

“Cricket mustn’t tire himself,” said Lady Margaret anxiously. She noted the child’s cheek. “Let the pretty things go to sleep in their nest. Cricket shall have them again in the morning.”

But, pleased with his toys, Ormsby refused to part with them. "Dey can seep with Cricket," he said.

Reluctant to excite the little patient, Lady Margaret let him have his way.

"You must give them pretty names," said Judy, "and then we will tell them to be good and go to sleep and let Cricket go to sleep, too."

The Cricket looked up at her with wondering eyes. He smiled—he always smiled when he looked at Judy's face—and then, as at a happy thought, again he clapped his hands.

"I will tissen the big one Leppo," he cried, "and te ittle one Darlin' Doody; uncle Leppo ses oo is a darlin'," and then the hectic spot faded out of the white cheek, the eyes drooped, and the Cricket said he was tired.

Lady Margaret forbore to look at Judy; had she done so she would have seen cheeks rivalling in paleness those of the little prattler. She busied herself about the cot, smoothing the pillow and cooing soft words of endearment.

But the child was restless.

“ I fear the excitement has been too much for him,” said his mother ; “ he would not go to sleep till you came, and he was awake so early. He has so little strength left.”

“ Cricket go to seep in Doody’s lap,” the child said, lifting his head from the pillow. “ Leppo and Darlin’ Doody, too,” and he seized the squirrels, which had curled themselves close up beside him. They sprang away.

“ Never mind,” said Judy gently ; “ I’ll put them into such a funny nest,” and she took the little creatures up and placed them in the pockets of her habit once more.

The Cricket was charmed, and with his old action tried to express his glee with his hands, but they failed him. Then his little lip quivered, and though he strove manfully against them, the tears, from sheer weakness, trickled down his poor wasted cheeks.

“ Cricket seep in Doody’s lap,” he cried, and with infinite tenderness Judy lifted the light little burden out of its warm nest, wrapped round it a soft Angora shawl, and sat down by the fire. The child nestled close up to her.

“Ting,” he said; “ting de pitty song about Allan-a-Dale. Cricket can ting it, but Leppo won’t let him.” Again the little lip quivered and the tears came.

“He is terribly weak,” whispered Lady Margaret; “we humour him in everything, poor wee man; he has a wonderful ear for music.”

“Ting,” repeated the tiny voice imperatively, “ting Allan-a-Dale.”

And with not the very firmest of voices Judy sang, choosing the two last verses of the ballad. To the first verse the child beat time with his small clenched hand, then his eyes closed and the slender fingers relaxed, and when, soft and tender, Judy’s clear notes died on the words, “And the youth it was told by was Allan-a-Dale,” the Cricket had fallen into a sweet restful slumber. He lay like a bit of sculptured marble in the arms of his gentle nurse, the long dark lashes of the blue veined lids resting on his white cheeks. Tear-drops glistened in Judy’s eyes as she laid the child back in his cot with a touch so skilfully tender it could not have crumpled the most

fragile rose-leaf. She forbore from even a kiss, only hovered over the delicate bud a loving moment and then stole away.

A screen was between the cot and the door, which, as she approached, quietly opened. Lady Margaret had slipped out a minute before. This door led into a larger room, which was used by the Ladies Le Pole as a small morning library. There they wrote their letters, and read. Judy, in obedience to instructions Lady Margaret had whispered, directed her steps to this room, entering it by the now open door. As she did so she saw a figure holding it back. In the uncertain light she thought it was probably Mr. Dredger, and she passed on. Then the door softly closed, and she turned round. With a quick action she placed her hand on her heart, and gave a little gasp. Not a trace of colour was left in the white, startled face.

She was not so strong as she was but a few months since, and, strive though she did, she could not command composure. She trembled and her eyelid quivered nervously. But she found words which, if they were

uttered with a faltering voice, were yet dignified and cold.

“Lord Le Pole,” she said, “this is a very unexpected pleasure. I understood you were travelling.”

She had heard he was in the company of the fascinating Creamy, but she was too proud to mention her name, or by sign or word let him suppose she entertained any interest in his doings.

For a moment Lord Le Pole’s courage failed him. Then he noted how slight the lithe round figure had become, how the bloom and freshness had faded from the sweet young face, and how mournful the brilliant eyes looked out from their heavy fringe. But he noted, too, in that lightning moment of conscience-stricken fear, that the slight figure was very erect and icily still.

A rush of passionate dread swept over him.

Was he to lose her at the eleventh hour? Was his awakening too late? Had her pure, true nature revolted from his as shallow and unworthy? Her cheeks were pale, her eyes were faded, but too surely he read on the

calm open brow, in the firm curve of the soft mouth, and the very chilly clearness of her eyes, that hers was no weak spirit to cower within itself at its first wound in the battle of life. The shock, the first keen pang was over, and instead of the simple trusting girl whose days had been as a year of summer, there was a brave woman to suffer and to do.

"Nothing but the truth, the naked truth, without a shadow of turning, will save me," he said, "if even then it may save me."

So he told her his story. He told it her in that chill November eve, without passionate declamation, without feverish pleading; calmly, almost coldly—he feared to break down—he told her all.

She listened at first with a sad, scornful smile, and once she stopped him with an imperious gesture. It was when he told her of Ned snatching the flowers from her breast and she quiescent, so it had seemed to him.

"Stop," she cried, "it was a poor trophy from the wreck of a too faithful love, a few faded flowers. Lord Le Pole, Edward Rawson has a true heart. I did him grievous wrong."

He had been on his defence until now. He had told her all his error, his bitterly repented jealousy. He must plead now as he had never pleaded before, he must plead for dear life, and love far beyond life ; for life without Judy would be to him only as the enforced existence of the wretched slave at the galley.

He was travel-stained and weary. His eyes were hot in his head.

He came up to her, he seized her hand, she could not free it.

“You did me no dishonour in the world’s eyes,” she said, “you had spoken no word to me. If I thought you liked me, it may have been because I liked you, my lord ; you were not bound to me.”

There was a noble pride in the girl’s simple words. She did not wish to shirk the truth that she *had* yielded her heart.

“*Spoken* no word,” he cried. “Ask your heart, Judy, did it want words to tell you I loved you ?”

Close beside her, her hand clasped to his breast, her head averted, he demanded an answer.



“It is your right to withhold forgiveness if you will, but it is not your right to refuse me an answer to my self-justifying question. Judy, did you not *know* I loved you?”

She could not help herself. She turned her head slowly round, looked him with frank eyes full in the face and said :

“Yes, I knew it.”

Closer he impelled her to him.

“And you believe I am now speaking truth, do you not?” he asked, as if his very life hung on his words.

“Yes,” she whispered falteringly.

“Then, Judy, you need no oath or protestation to make you believe me when I say I did not know, that is, I was not sure that you loved me. Many a heart I had seen fooled away—forgive me, my darling, oh, for dear love’s sake forgive me, but I did indeed think you had fooled my heart away.”

The man did not know it, he would never know it, Judy hardly knew it herself, but the words, “I was not sure that you loved me” broke down a barrier of pride that, almost against her will, withstood his pleading. If

he did not know he had won her, he could never have thought she was too lightly won. She could forgive the wrong he had done her in thinking she could be guilty of "fooling a heart away," but not that she was too hasty of love.

The exquisite purity, the singleness of purpose of Judy's nature, allowed of no ungenerous reserve, no self-satisfying equivocation; to forgive meant. To Judy, to forget.

"There is not much to forgive," she whispered, drooping her head to hide the eloquent blood that told its own tale; "it was all a mistake."

\* \* \* \* \*

The evening shadows lengthened unheeded, the fire died out in the grate; dull, dreary, misty, the chill November day shivered to its rest, but to Judy and Le Pole it

"Was the time of roses;  
They plucked them as they passed."

A light hand turned the handle of the door and Lady Margaret entered. Judy returned

to outer life. As on the sands that summer night she turned accusingly to Le Pole, and with keen feminine inconsistency asked why he had not told her how late it was getting.

"I did not know it," he answered significantly.

Judy bit her lip. Lady Margaret smiled. With a little provoking toss of her head Judy put her right hand into her pocket.

"Oh, the squirrels," she cried, and before she could prevent them the little animals made their way out, and one on each shoulder, they sat up and washed their faces.

Judy laughed till the happy tears came. Lady Margaret had to explain, which she did, as Judy made the pretty creatures prisoners and replaced them in their basket.

"They shall have a proper house in the morning," said Lady Margaret, "and Le Pole will put them in all right, won't you?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly," he answered; "much better that Miss Aylmere should stay over the night, she understands wild animals; I don't. Squirrels in especial are risky, and if I hurt them the Cricket would never forgive

me. He has 'christened' them after us, you know," and he looked at Judy just a little mischievously.

"How do you know?" she asked with her old air of petty sauciness.

"I was present at the ceremony," he said ungenerously, "and I heard the lullaby, too, but I didn't like it," and he hummed the concluding line of *Allan-a-Dale*.

Fortunately for Le Pole a servant at that moment announced "Miss Aylmere's horse," and only staying to drink a hasty cup of tea, Judy prepared to take the saddle.

"I was to ask," she said to Lady Margaret, "if cousin Egbert could be of any service at the Manor House, but as Lord Le Pole has returned no one will be needed. We are all very sorry to hear of Miss Le Pole's death."

"Yes," said Lady Margaret, "we shall miss her in a way, poor old lady, though she did not spend much energy in gaining affections from any one."

"No, it all went on her farm," said Le Pole. "She will be missed there. She was a generous hostess. We expect my father to-morrow."

Then asking leave of Judy with his eyes, which was granted by a blush and a faint little nod, Le Pole said to his sister :

“Maggy dear, you have been in my secret from the first. ‘Darlin’ Doody’ has promised to be the Cricket’s aunt.”

Lady Margaret went up to Judy, who looked uncertain whether to laugh or cry—she ended in doing both—and embraced her warmly.

“At last my heart’s desire,” she said. “Papa will be so pleased.”

And then Le Pole said very simply, “Judy, I did not tell you that the election petition is withdrawn. I hope the old knight will forgive his nephew.”

It seemed to Le Pole that even his hereditary seat would have been worth forfeiting for such another look from Judy’s eyes.

It was a late hour for such a long ride home, but Judy insisted on taking it, and unattended by any escort but Peters, who was not a little elated by the very marked turn of events evidenced in Judy’s every movement

and beaming face, and Lord Le Pole's "ownership air," as he told Giles in the morning. "He was like a man aside of himself," he said to the delighted shepherd.

Gloriana and the brown cob sent the turf flying along the side of the road, but it was considerably past the Hall dinner-hour when Judy put in a penitential appearance.

When the dessert was on the table Sybella, excusing herself on the score of some urgent business with the steward, who had sent in word that he wished to see her, left her father and Judy alone.

After just a little hesitation Judy rose and knelt by the old man's side, and without reserve told him all her love-story, from, as she said, the very beginning.

"Judy, my loving little child," he said when she had finished, "you have made me a very happy old man, not because of the old lands, dear—that seems to me now such a very little thing—but because you are making what I did, a true marriage in the sight of God. Death cannot sever that union, dear, for though there is neither marriage nor giving in mar-

riage in heaven, there are no broken ties there."

Then he laid his hands on her head in old patriarchal fashion and blessed her.



## CHAPTER XI.

“ All was ended now, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow,  
All the aching of heart, the restless unsatisfied longing,  
All the dull deep pain, and constant anguish of patience. ’

THE squire could not be dissuaded from attending his old friend Miss Le Pole’s funeral, although the day set in with a bitter east wind and indications of a snowfall.

“ I should not care so much,” said Sybella, “ if it were to be a quiet, private affair, but the Albanys are always so glad of an opportunity to place themselves *en evidence* they are sure to get up a grand ceremony. *I* call a pretentious country funeral a festival, for there is always a feast.”

“ Oh, Sybella,” exclaimed Judy, “ a feast is for rejoicing, not mourning.”

“ For both, my dear,” said the squire as if casually, going out of the room to end the argument, “ *festus*, a holiday ; *festum*, solemn.”

“ It was all very well in the old days,”



Sybella continued, "when there were no trains, and people from far and near had to come as best they could, then it was necessary to provide food. Many a time the old banqueting-hall here has been draped in black, the floor strewn with rushes mixed with rosemary and rue, the platters filled with funeral bread, but that was long before a Le Pole was even thought of. Custom has done away with funeral feasts, and those who give them ought at any rate to have the excuse of hereditary observance. Why, Marlby Grange is only two hundred years old."

"And two hundred years ago," said Judy, just a little hotly, "funeral feasts were in all their glory. There is a very grand banqueting-hall at the Grange."

"Not 'grand,' child, gorgeous; grand belongs to the mediæval times, gorgeous is an upholsterer's term, and aptly suits the banqueting-chamber of the Grange."

"Sybella," asked Judy, a little mischievously, "how is it that the Egberts were never ennobled?"

"You mean, I suppose, why they were not

given titles?" Sybella spoke with scornful assertion. "They were offered, reign after reign, both titles and honours, but they were always too high-minded and honest in those venal times to accumulate wealth. They had lands, and it took all their tact and determination from father to son to keep those lands together; they never had the great means required to keep up a *patent* of nobility, so they contented themselves with the nobility of old blood. The lands Miss Le Pole had were lost by the squire of Cromwell's time. He would always drink the king's health, and Cromwell fined him in a quarter of the estate, and gave it to a Roundhead officer, the son of a yeoman-farmer, from whom Lord Albany's grandmother, who was, you know, Miss Le Pole's mother, descended. That was how she came by the property. If it ever comes back to us"—Sybella spoke as if half to herself—"we will have nothing to do with the Le Pole quarterings." Then she added aloud, "I hear Banting has the ordering of the funeral."

It was not either a gorgeous or a grand funeral, only a very *comme il faut* and suitable

one. The deceased lady had not departed in the odour of sanctity, nor on the breath of popular esteem. She had not been unhonoured, but it could not be said that she had been honoured, and most certainly, except in the case of her immediate *employés*, she was not regretted. She had lived to herself, and so she had died. Her impulsive acts of charity, not a few, were remembered in some such way as the wit and song of the gay butterflies of society are remembered—they had lightened a weary hour. As in nature, such spontaneous ephemeræ pass with the sun that gives them birth. Many a generous deed, too, had been afterwards obliterated by some capricious act which, if it did not emanate from actual spite and ill-nature, was certainly the outcome of selfishness and temper. She had, too, been more of a lavish than a generous mistress, and conduct that has not in it the regulating motive of justice, inspires neither respect nor gratitude in the keenly perceptive minds of those who serve us. Perhaps the emotion nearest akin to regret evoked by her death was that experienced by Squire

Egbert, and that was more of sentiment than feeling. He knew she had liked him, had for a wonder always remained constant to that liking, and his loyal heart held for her a very chivalrous friendship. He was

“To her virtues very kind,  
And to her faults a little blind.”

And so with sincere regret, if not an absolute feeling of a blank, the squire in a bitter east wind bared his head as his old friend was lowered into the Albany vault, and took his death home. Its chill was on him as, at the special desire of the deceased lady's lawyer, he returned with the family to the Manor House, to be present at the reading of her will.

It was a very business-like, matter-of-fact document, but astounding to those interested. It was of recent date. The whole of the testator's personal effects, with certain exceptions, and her money and investments were willed to her nephew; but her landed property, inherited without entail from her mother, and which comprised and particularized in the will that “portion of the ancient estate of the Egberts forfeited during the time of the

Commonwealth," was devised to Judith Aylmere on one condition—that within a twelve-month of the testator's death she married Edward Rawson, Member of Parliament for Oxminster. Should the legatee decline this condition, the property was then to pass to the said Edward Rawson, to him and his heirs for ever. All her jewels and lace she left to the same Judith Aylmere unconditionally.

As the squire drove home, chilled and shivering, he said to himself with unrepining submission, "Man proposes, but God disposes." But he would have been more than human if he had not felt and owned to a sense of keen disappointment. Only a few days ago he had rejoiced in what he believed to be the fulfilment of his long-cherished wish, had taken a sort of self-gratulatory pleasure in the reflection that he had himself furthered its accomplishment, and now he had the mortification of knowing that the very means he had relied upon to give him the desire of his heart had shut it out from him for ever.

For a passing moment it seemed very strange and just a little hard to bear, but not

for the shadow of a moment did he wish that Judy had chosen the man of her liking, and not the man of her love.

As he neared the old keep he looked up through the now fast-falling snow at the proud turret over which his banner hung in listless folds, and somehow there came back to him with ringing clearness the words spoken there on that bright June morning by the young girl who was fated twice to lay low his castle in the air; the gay pennant, he remembered, was floating in the breeze :

“ I think if I played you false, it would curl itself round the pole and never wave again.”

And a great peace filled the old squire's heart.

The next morning Peters was despatched with an urgent summons to Mabella. In the middle of the night the squire had been seized with acute pain in the chest and breathlessness—congestion of the lungs, the doctor said. From the first there was no hope. There was no strength to combat disease, and at once the heart's action began to fail. Before the close of the second night of his attack the good old

squire had sunk to his rest. Just at the closing scene Sybella had to lead Mabella out of the room with gentle force, the agony of her grief and self-reproach was greater than she could bear; it seemed as if her mind would give way. The strain of her most wretched relations with her husband had weakened her spirit for the time, and she broke out in a perfect passion of despair.

The old servants had gathered in the death-chamber, Giles at the door leaning on his crook. There was not a dry eye among them. The painful gasping had ceased; all was still. The hand Judy held in hers was icy cold. Then she bent her face down to his lips to see if they still moved; they parted with a smile as of recognition. And then she felt passing over her soft warm cheek a faint chill air. It was cousin Egbert's last breath.

And in the narrow chancel of the venerable chapel the last male Egbert lay in state, the tall sentinel tapers keeping watch and ward. The arch over the east window was filled in with snowdrift, obscuring its exquisite tracery. The tangled curtain of boscage that drooped

from the transom without was heavy, too, with soft clinging snow, but the rays of the bright winter sun streamed through the many-coloured narrow lights and lit up the richly-decorated piscina, the relic of an exploded ritual, bringing into clear relief the arms of the Egberts, with the date 1388.

The five customary days had passed, and on the morrow the squire was to be laid in the niche that had so long been waiting for him in the old vault beside the parish church.

Many a solitary hour during those sad days of waiting Judy had passed in the still chapel, kneeling by what had been her loving and most-beloved friend and cousin. Sometimes Mabella had come with her, Sybella too. It had been a solemn time, and its softening influence seemed to bind closer together the two last direct descendants of the old stock. Each day, too, Giles had come in through the outside door, which during the day was left open for those who would to enter, and had stood beside his old master's bier with his bare head bowed, thinking perhaps that his own summons could not be very far off. He



came, though, as much to "see after," as he said, "the little miss," as to do honour to the kind hand that had fed him all the days of his pilgrimage.

"It seems terrible hard to bear," he said to Judy, standing with the coffin between them, as she laid her head down on the pall and wept as if her heart would break. "There's nought so unnatural loike to young zowls as death. But oh, little miss, if it could a bin zo as you could get a look ov hyn now, it's not vor hyn 'em tears would coome, it ud be vor theeself. Ah, in natur', zoa many years must run oot avore thee face'll shine loike his. He'd be martal vexed if zo bees as un's let to zee thee now."

The grave words went home to the young girl's tender heart.

"You see, Giles," she said, drying her eyes, "it's the last time. They take him away to-morrow;" and then the tears gushed forth again. "Oh, cousin Egbert, cousin Egbert," she cried, "you did love and trust me so, and I loved you far, far more than you can ever know now. What will the old place be without

you? It will never, never be the same again. The cruel spring will come again with its green leaves and merry birds, but it won't waken you, cousin Egbert. It will be always winter where you are. How can I ride Gloriana and you not at my side? And the cob, he'll miss you, too; he'll whinny when I go to his stall, and look for you over my shoulder. Everything will miss you; there's a sob in the air everywhere. Oh, I could lay my head down beside yours to-night and never, never lift it again."

But Giles took her by the hand and led her out of the chapel up the spiral stairs and back to the light and warmth of the bright boudoir, which yet seemed so desolate, where her cousins sat in silent sorrow.

"It ain't right, little miss, to feed thee's troubles thick way; zeems loike as thee would flitch anont God A'mighty."

As he said this he took off his hat respectfully.

He did not think it needful to tell her that there was no winter where cousin Egbert was,

or to set forth in preachments the correct theology of matter and spirit; this the first hour of her first great sorrow, he knew, was winter-time to Judy.

But as the old shepherd walked homewards, leaning heavily on his staff, his heart took comfort for the little miss, for he knew that soon for her the winter would be past and the rains over and gone, and that then the flowers would appear on the earth and the time of the singing of birds would come, for the voice of the turtle would be heard in *her* land.

And as he entered his humble cottage he said to himself:

“There bees times with the wisest of us when we canno’ feel what we kneows.”

Mrs. Aylmere had arrived at the Hall. The major was expected in the morning; he had exercised a wise discretion in not coming sooner. The part he expected to fill at the sad ceremony of the morrow was that of chief mourner. That the squire’s daughters would be present never entered into his calculations. Women of the higher classes very rarely went

to funerals in the metropolis, and Major Tyler had had very little experience of such matters in the provinces. So he went to town and fitted himself out with handsome sables, entertained some old acquaintances who had lately seemed a little shy of him to *recherché* champagne dinners at an exclusive hotel in Mayfair—he had long ceased to be a member of any military club—talked mysteriously of the onerous duties of large landed proprietors, spoke of improving the tumble-down old Hall, and hinted at the probability of standing for the county.

It was remarkable what a rehabilitating power there seemed to be in these little entertainments. At one great military club the name of the segregated major was entered for readmission to the flock, and the secretary of a limited and extremely exclusive corporation hoped that when Major Tyler came to town for the season he would allow himself to be put into nomination for membership.

“Lucky fellow, that Tyler,” said Colonel Buff; “married an old woman and came in for no end of a place; the oldest family in

the county, he tells me. I always said Tyler was a knowing shot."

"Some queer story about him," said the Honourable Valdimir Pouncebody, of Her Majesty's Own Hussars, "shy at cards, some one said — had to leave the 'Scrap and Scramble,' hadn't he?"

"Oh, they say it was all a mistake," put in Captain Tout; "luck went against him. Got mixed up with some woman, too—hard lines on a fellow. By Jove, what Cliquot he gave us last night."

"Ah, ah," said the Honourable Valdimir, "no use totting up old scores; clean sweep and begin again is fair play, I say. I daresay it wasn't his fault. *Cherchez la femme*, you know."

They nodded response to the honourable gentleman and voted that bygones should be bygones, and so Major Tyler received a preliminary whitewashing.

Miss Le Pole's will had given complete satisfaction to no one—there is something at best peculiarly unsatisfactory in the nature of wills in general—least of all

did it give satisfaction to her nephew, the earl.

To Judy it was the cause of both deep and keen pain. She had wished at once to resign the bequest of the gems and lace to Lady Albany, but Lord Le Pole would not hear of her doing so, and she gave up the point. Neither did the earl wish it. He had benefited very substantially by his eccentric relative's dispositions, and he did not grudge his son's future wife a share of the spoil. But it was upon the Manor House estate he had set his heart, and that had passed almost out of his grasp, as it were, in the most aggravating way, for he heard from the solicitor by whom the will had been drawn up that the condition relating to young Rawson had been quite a late thought, the caprice of an hour. Miss Le Pole, he said, had been gratified at Mr. Rawson giving her up his bedroom, and she had heard from Mrs. Aylmere that the young fellow was in love with Miss Aylmere, who was very well inclined to him also, only she had lately imbibed some high-flown political notions and fancied Ned too extreme.

Poor Mrs. Aylmere! All her little weak dodges had resulted, not only in defeat, but in disaster.



## CHAPTER XII.

“To swallow gudgeons ere they’re caught,  
And count their chickens ere they’re hatched.”

“Could he with reason murmur at his case,  
Himself sole author of his own disgrace?”

MAJOR TYLER did not hold the chief place of honour at the burial of the noble gentleman into whose family he had stolen like the dastardly coward he was, but he made one of an outside group of mourners who were supplied with the shrouding cloaks, the peculiar privilege of near and regretful friendship.

Major Tyler did not know his way very well about the old house, and little wonder; for, as Judy was used to say, it needed a person to be born in it to know its ups and downs and turns and twists. The major was apt to lose himself in the labyrinth of communicating corridors, stairs, and double doors.

His room, by a neat arrangement of Grant,



the old butler, was apart from that portion devoted to the family apartments. It was a long-disused chamber near the banqueting-hall, where, as had been the immemorial custom, the will was to be read immediately on the return of the funeral party.

It was a very imposing chamber, half filled by the great standing bedstead, of Austrian ancestry, family tradition said. At its foot stood the old locker which served as a seat, but had once been a repository for the wealth and apparel of the owner, who always slept with his sword by his side, a needful precaution in the days of romance. The hangings were of tapestry, showy with scenes of hunting and hawking. The posts had nodding plumes of feathers set in silver rings. There were curious old painted chairs, and for a table a trestle and board covered with a faded velvet cloth, on which was embroidered the Egbert arms. On the toilet-board was a steel mirror. Tapestry of the same design as that of the bed hung on the walls, and from the one deep oriel window hanging sconces from the walls held wax candles.

It was, all in all, fit lodgment for a king, at least so thought the proud, confident major, as he attired himself in the handsome sables the morning of the funeral.

“Very grand and sumptuous, and all that sort of thing,” he said to himself as, his toilet completed, he gave his moustache the last war-like twirl, “but be —— if it is to be my habitation. I’d die of the family blues or get mediæval jaundice.”

He proceeded to find his way to the chapel, where the company were to assemble, but it was early, so he loitered, stopping at the banqueting-room to examine the preparations for the momentous gathering later on. It was a dull, dark day, the snow deep on the ground and banked up on the windows. There did not seem any special arrangements. He had still twenty minutes to spare, so he lounged round the room, throwing back his shoulders every now and then with an air of approving proprietorship. He counted the portraits along one side of the wall, each set on an oak panel. Of these there were twenty in all, the respective owners of the place.

The last was the squire just dead. It was with a feeling of considerable complacency that he pictured to himself his own image in continuation, arrayed in the uniform of his late regiment, the 6th Dragoons—a startling contrast, he flattered himself, to the sombre vesture of the last generation of squires; “guys,” he irreverently called them. Then he drew up in the middle of the old chamber and took a bird’s-eye view of the gallant men and noble women, age and youth and middle age, as they had come and gone. He had heard some of the stories attached to some of them. The young bride in her flimsy gown of gauze, “a slight she-slip of royal blood;” the same face thirty years on proud and uncomely, a stiff kirtle and high ruff instead of the shadowy raiment. Of all periods, by master hands and less considered limners, some strange to the Egbert blood, others showing the distinctive features of the race, a goodly group, take them all in all. Fierce men in mailed armour, brave cavaliers in sweeping plumes, laced coats and ruffles, dignitaries of the Church and the law, diplo-

matic personages, and sportsmen in hunting paraphernalia.

Major Tyler surveyed them all, feeling an accession of aggrandizement, and his whole person inflated with the noble traditions of the race whose male sequence he had been "called upon" to take up. He should hyphen his and the Egbert patronymic, slightly altering the former to Telliére-Egbert, or Egbert-Telliére — yes, that sounded better. His "French" origin—and he smiled with cunning satisfaction—would come in handy; and then he thought with equal complacency of how well his early antecedents had been concealed, that not even prying Mrs. Aylmere had ferreted them out, although she had actually lived in his native place. At the name of Aylmere he experienced a slight reaction. Would Judy put her threat into execution and inform Mabella of his part in the dog's death? If she did he would brazen it out. The possibility, however, was depressing in his exalted frame of mind, stirring up disagreeable reminiscences. Elsie, how would she act? And then somehow he took com-

fort to his prophetic soul, for was she not magnanimous almost to idiotcy? And besides, she had now a public name and would not risk exposure, for, however innocent, "a story" never improved a woman's reputation. And if some compromising items did leak out, why, these "old cats"—his recently-wedded wife and her maiden sister—were as proud as Lucifer, and would be only too thankful to hush things up at *any price*, and he knew what *his* price was.

The fire crackled and flared in the vaulted grate. He spread his hands to its reassuring warmth, contemplating with an eye of appurtenance, if only of partial comprehension, the hieroglyphic heraldry of his adoptive ancestry carved on the great panel over the oak mantelpiece. There was a tiny space still available, and heraldry was ingenious!

He sauntered to the daïs and noticed that chairs, high-backed oak seats, had been placed beside the massive table, round which centuries ago the lords of the Egbert manor entertained their guests of high degree. Involuntarily he counted them, eight in all.

Then he was sensible of a strange qualm, akin to apprehension, some such sensation as might be experienced when, a crisis past, threatening symptoms recur. But the major did not attempt to trace his symptoms to their source. He hastened away from the portentous preparations with the faint-heartedness of an apprehensive conscience.

No sun shone through the narrow windows, gay with many-coloured devices. He mounted a long trestle and looked out on the park through a lattice pane which had been opened for the purpose of ventilation. "The old hereditary trees," thickly covered with the snowy vesture and motionless in funereal gloom, seemed mourning with something deeper than "a vapid vegetable love" the last male of the Egbert race. The major felt the gloom, but not the sentiment. With the keen comprehensive eye of an appraiser he marked a goodly few of the venerable growths, and rattled the loose cash in his trousers' pockets as he thought of the satisfactory results of the woodman's axe.

Through the dull leaden air came the dismal

tolling of the bell. He looked at his watch and made for the arched doorway, before which was the great oak screen, richly covered with what was a replication of the armorial designs over the fireplace. Just as he gained its cover Sybella and Judy entered from a side door. He could catch some words, putting them together in a disjointed fashion. "Yes, she is calmer to-day," Sybella said. He did not hear Judy's reply, her head was turned from him. He strained his ear. "Yes," answered the former to some question, "he told her he had not disinherited her . . . forgave her." That was all the eaves-dropper could gather. Silently he let himself out, and with a spring in his foot and a swing in his gait went triumphantly to the burial of the "just and good squire," as his attributive soul termed his testamentary father-in-law.

His sudden accession of jubilant confidence distracted his attention from the funeral arrangements, and it was not until the procession was fairly under weigh that he perceived, although he had been shrouded by an attendant with a mourner's cloak, he had not

been awarded a place among the relatives of the deceased, nor even among the intimate friends of the family—he was seated in the coach containing the family doctor and lawyer, each of whom was attired in a vestment similar to his own; and again that unaccountable qualm passed over his apprehensive conscience.

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

They laid him beside the dear dead wife from whom his loyalty had never swerved, and for whom his love to the very last had been as warm as in their bridal days.

“Side by side here, one in one *there*,” thought Judy as, holding her mother’s hand, she followed Mabella and Sybella up the narrow pathway of the peaceful kirkyard to the door of the open vault. The principal service had been held in the chapel of the Hall, but the vicar read the concluding prayers as the bearers rested the coffin before lowering it into its last abiding-place. In vain the major had endeavoured to assert his position as “chief mourner”—women, in his



estimation, had no right to count in public—but he had been met by a combined and silent resistance, against which he was powerless, and so, perforce, was content to take place as an inconsiderable outsider, where he nursed his wrath to keep it warm.

Judy looked round and marked, as a strange circumstance, that the major stood apart in sulks under the interlacing branches of the two yew-trees which arched over the unhonoured remains of the woman the story of whose crime her cousin had told her that bright day of June, so full to her of sweet and sad memories. She was glad it was not summer now. She thought she could not have borne to see the sun shining on the quaint old vicarage, gay with its fragrant yellow rose, or gleaming on the many-coloured east window of the old church. There were no swallows beneath its eaves now to twit her of the summer gone—she almost thought, for ever out of her life; no daisies or coltswort at her feet or green grass on the quiet mounds, levelled for the time by the deep-lying snow; there was no sign of life outside the solemn

figures moving with a shadowy stillness that seemed quite apart from being.

It had been autumn-time when Dulsie died. Then, too, the fading verdure and chilly vapours had seemed to harmonize with the paraphernalia of death. She was glad that the spring-time and the summer would come again with only living memories of the beloved dead. It was one o'clock when, the sad rites over, the funeral party dispersed, leaving only those who were guests in the house to return to the Hall with the mourners. Among these were Lord Albany and his son.

At two o'clock Grant, with much solemnity and dignity, heralded into the hall Mabella and her sister, with Judy and Mrs. Aylmere, Lord Albany and his son, a cousin of the late Mrs. Egbert, and the major. There, standing up at the table on the dais, Mr. Fisk, the family lawyer, awaited their coming. Grant seated each individual in an allotted chair, placing Major Tyler the very last. Mr. Fisk then, without preamble, proceeded to read the will.

Apart from its descriptive technicalities it

was short and concise, its provisions few, and those clear and comprehensible. The entire estate was devised to Mabella for her life—charged with a certain annuity to Sybella and one of smaller amount to Judy—on one condition, that she parted from her husband for the term of her natural life. Should she elect to abide by the man she had been led into marrying without her father's sanction, the property then at once was to pass to Sybella, charged with the same annuity to Judy, and in addition a yearly sum of two hundred a year to Mabella, to be increased to six hundred should her husband die or she separate from him. On the death of Mabella and Sybella, in the event of the former accepting the property with the conditions, Judy was to be the sole inheritor, taking the old name in addition to any she might by right of ultimate marriage bear at the time. The same provision was made should Sybella, in consequence of Mabella's refusing her father's conditions, become possessor of the property. There were some minor bequests, which none seemed to heed or hear. Every eye was

turned upon Mabella and her husband. She did not keep suspense long on the tension.

With calm, simple dignity, blended with a sorrowful humility, she rose from her place at the head of the table and said :

“I acknowledge the justice of my beloved father’s will, and I accept the property with all its conditions.”

That was all she said.

Judy was pale as death. Le Pole, whose seat was next to hers, took her hand as if to impart courage.

Sybella then rose and with equal dignity said :

“I rejoice at my sister’s decision. The inheritance would have been very bitter to me had she determined otherwise. We can still point without a blush to our motto, *sans tache*.” Then she sat down.

And all this time, but a few minutes by the dial, Geoffrey Tyler sat immovable, his tongue for the moment paralyzed and his lips dry and parched. Now and again, as he attempted to utter speech, they parted with an audible sound as of fever agony.

The business was over. All rose to depart.

Then the tension gave way and he sprang to his feet. He clenched his hand and brought it down on the table with a blow that echoed through the hall. Mabella stood calmly defiant, with just the faintest trace of a smile on her lips. As a precautionary measure Mrs. Aylmere slipped unobserved from the room, and summoned Grant and a footman in readiness for an emergency.

The blow unloosed his tongue. It heralded its freedom with a blasphemous oath, the like of which, even in the lawless days of old, had surely never resounded within those venerated walls. It seemed to relieve him, for though his voice shook with suppressed rage he spoke quietly and without bluster. He said, looking full at his wife, who neither flinched nor turned pale :

“The law shall decide between us, and if this”—another oath—“instrument holds good, I shall claim you, even without the only thing that ever made me touch the border of your garment,” he made a gesture of loathing. “No doting clodhopper can touch a husband’s rights, and senile and uxorious

spinsters, if they will jump into the matrimonial trap, will find it sure and fast. Listen to me, madam, while I tell you the effect of the dainty noose you were always trying on your portly neck; it makes you my bond-slave, my wageless servant, my *âme damnée*, my goods and chattels, my household commodity, anything and everything that constitutes a thing to possess—absolutely possess, mind you, for in such a bond there is no quittance.”

He ceased. Judy trembled and even Sybella winced. Mabella only smiled, and at a sign from her Mr. Fisk produced a document, not very important-looking or lengthy. He opened it. “Major Tyler,” he said, “you have over-shot your mark. If after you have refreshed your memory by glancing your eye over this true copy, properly attested, of original deeds in safe keeping, you should still wish to enforce your matrimonial rights, you will have the goodness to instruct your solicitor. I will act for my late client’s daughter, in whose name I utterly repudiate you and your claims.”

He handed the document in question to the major. Obeying the fascination of fear, the latter took it. The same instant it fell from his hands, and just casting a glance to see if the way out was clear, he made a step towards Mabella, lifting his hand in a menacing gesture. In nautical phrase the major had been taken in very bad weather. He had been heavily struck on his weather bow, and now, and with fatal effect, amidships, and was breaking up.

Quick as lightning Le Pole intervened, so suddenly the major was taken aback and thrown against the table.

Mabella did not stir an inch, or even change countenance. Then at a sign from Mrs. Aylmere, who had hastened back to the scene, her reserve force, Grant and the footman, hurried from behind the screen and placed themselves beside their mistress.

"Show Major Tyler out," said Mabella with quiet dignity.

"This way, sir," and Grant respectfully but significantly pointed to the door.

But the major, like a spent fox, showed feeble front, he stood still and glared.

“Remove him,” cried Mabella.

Which with heart and hand Grant and his auxiliary did. At the door of exit he struggled free, and uttering an oath of wild blasphemy rushed out.

“There’s a carriage with your traps waiting for you at the back door,” screamed Grant after him, making a speaking-trumpet of his hands.

Instinct guided the wretch, and in the servants’ omnibus—a parting indignity devised by Grant—he was slowly conveyed over the noiseless snow, past his prospective victims of the woodland, and out for ever from the honoured and peaceful home on which his baleful presence had cast the first shade of dishonour.

It was late in the night when he reached London. The only train he could get was a parliamentary one, and the line was at one part blocked by snow. He had ample leisure to reflect on his six months’ campaign and its disastrous finish, and to consider his plans



for the future. These were simple. A nomad life on the continent, with future possibilities of confiding prey.

Mabella's lawyer notified him that he was instructed to pay to him the yearly sum of two hundred pounds, so long as he remained across the Channel. Should he set foot on British soil the payment was to cease. And the craven appeals which from time to time he made to his "still beloved though harsh-judging wife" drew from her nothing more. In a short time, according to the provisions of her father's will, she resumed her patronymic of Egbert, dropping that of Tyler. "Mrs. Mabella Egbert" she called herself.

This was acceptable to her social quorum, to whom the name of Tyler represented only mendacity and presumption. There were times, however, after an ecclesiastical diatribe on woman's whole duty, summed up in one word, "man," or fresh from a watered-out three-volume story of some weak soul's faithful but unrequited devotion to a roving lord and master, her old susceptibility, galvanized for a moment to seeming life, Mabella would

ask herself if she had quite lived up to all the requirements of marital duty. In this way Nemesis gave the blankly married wife an occasional *mauvais quart d'heure*. But Sybella, who instinctively knew the signs of such "tricks of conscience," as she called her sister's admonitory qualms, was ever ready with a telling *résumé* of the absentee's career and natal antecedents. This she found a never-failing restorative. Mabella was like a recently caught bird, which, regaining its freedom, but uncertain of its wings, hovers for a time over its gilded cage as if with intent to re-enter.

No possible advantage to herself would have compensated Sybella for what she would have considered the indelible disgrace of Mabella choosing to follow the fortunes of a man who, not only vicious in himself, had sprung from to her the ignoble class of traders; and that was in the eyes of the two sisters, the last of the Egberts, the one irremissible crime of the many brought home to Geoffrey Tyler.

Mrs. Aylmere's curiosity was much exercised with regard to the mysterious document

that had so effectually routed the formidable major, but it was not fated to be gratified; not for the present, at any rate. Her cousins had not seen fit to enlighten Judy, and Judy had not seen fit to question her cousins. But she had a keen suspicion that in some way her friend Elsie Eber had been the main agent of the discomfiture of "Tim's murderer," as she always to herself called her cousin's husband. For a little she thought it just possible that Elsie might be the real wife, but reflection showed her she could not be. The man had had too much at stake to play with loaded dice with the certainty of discovery. He was too surely Mabella's husband.

In a little time, however, there came a letter from Elsie. In it she spoke with a full cognizance of the late events at the Hall, and then she added: "It has been agreed that it would serve no end or purpose to make Major Tyler's story public property, and as he seems sensible of the mercy of silence your cousins have determined to let the matter stand as it is, and to live down the scandal which is sure to be set afloat. Mrs. Tyler has chosen the alter-

native she fully believes her father both wished and expected her to choose. Major Tyler is a known gambler, if not something more, and a *roué*. That is sufficient for outsiders to know. But, Judy dear, I feel I owe some little explanation of the half-confidence I gave you at Sandycot, and so, in as few words as I possibly can, I will explain the relations Geoffrey Tyler and I once held towards each other. I was married to him ten years ago. We lived together for six months. At the end of that time he deserted me, coolly writing to say that he had just discovered his first wife was still alive. I did not know he had been married before. He said he had believed her dead, and he sent me a newspaper of a year old, in which her death was recorded. He added that she was ill, supposed to be dying, and that if she did die he would repair the wrong he had done me. I believed him, and in all my agony and shame never doubted him. A few weeks after that letter my brother wrote to me that she was dead. I waited and waited, Judy, but he did not come. He never came again, and I never saw him again until that day at Sea-

pinks. I nearly died, too, but it was only my love that died, died as if it had never been. I lived. My brother obtained proof that Captain—he was not Major then—Tyler was aware of his wife's existence when he went through the ceremony of marriage with me. He obtained two letters he had written her just at the time he married me, refusing her the remittances she begged of him, for she was starving, she said. It was a clear case of bigamy. Poor woman! she was bitterly punished; divorced by one husband, deserted by the other. Well for her to die, young as she was, barely twenty. My wrong was beyond the power of man to remedy, and at my urgent request my brother forbore to punish him. I shrank from the exposure. Geoffrey Tyler was subtle though, and he calculated well. Once safely married to Miss Egbert, he knew that for the sake of the family I would be silent. I would have been silent still but for 'the sake of the family.'

“And so, dear Judy, Geoffrey Tyler passes out of our lives, like an ugly storm on a summer's day, only remembered by the devas-

tation it has caused. For myself, my home for the future is here, on the banks of the Arno. I live with my brother. I do not say I shall never more appear on the boards. Unrest may again seize me, and my spirit may crave for something out of still life. Then, dear, you will read that Elsie Eber is back among her old haunts, and wandering again from city to city, and perhaps to distant lands. But for the present I am content, and even my heart is at rest. About yourself, dear, I can only repeat what I said to you some weeks since—you have chosen well. I never knew a man with a more delicate sense of honour than Lord Le Pole, nor one with such a tender nature. He will have no secrets from you, and you will *lean on each other*. It does not do when all the leaning is on one side. You must not fret about your old friend Ned. He is essentially a man of action, and his wealth and Parliament will give him plenty to do. And some day, but not yet and not soon, he will marry; he will not choose unworthily, and he will be very happy, for the woman he makes his wife will be content with the mea-

sure he has to mete, and only ask for her own again, which will be something less than what would have been yours, dear."

The night before Judy's wedding a little packet was laid on the table. It contained a deed of gift, legally executed, by which the Manor House and the lands pertaining thereto became Judy Aylmere's and her heirs for ever. It was Ned Rawson's marriage gift to the girl he loved. There was a short letter inside, which filled Judy's heart with a pity almost akin to love. She showed it to no one, just dropped it into the fire with many regretful tears.

That night she said to her lover :

"Would you have resigned your seat for Oxminster if you had found that you had gained it through the bribery of your agents?"

"Yes, most certainly," he replied.

She looked relieved and grieved in one.

"But, Judy darling," he added, divining something of what was passing in her mind, "I hold what most people would call eccentric notions. Mr. Rawson is quite justified in the

eyes of the world. I withdrew the petition. He is the duly-elected member, and a very useful one he will be, I fancy. He will make himself a name, and then he is a millionaire."

Judy said nothing more, but in the quiet of her own room she sat silently thinking, and this is what she thought:

"He knew that he got the seat by the bribery of his own agents and the treachery of his opponent's—and he has kept it."

She was pained and relieved in one. Pained that her old friend Ned should not have felt his honour "grip," and yet relieved that it was so, for had he taken a loftier stand she might not have experienced so strongly that they two never could have become one, that Ned could not see things as she saw them.

She was justified to herself.

Giles was satisfied, too, as he looked in "the little miss's" face as she drove away with her bridegroom.

"They bees two as God A'mighty has made one," he said to himself as he turned homewards to his cottage.

And Mrs. Aylmere was satisfied also,

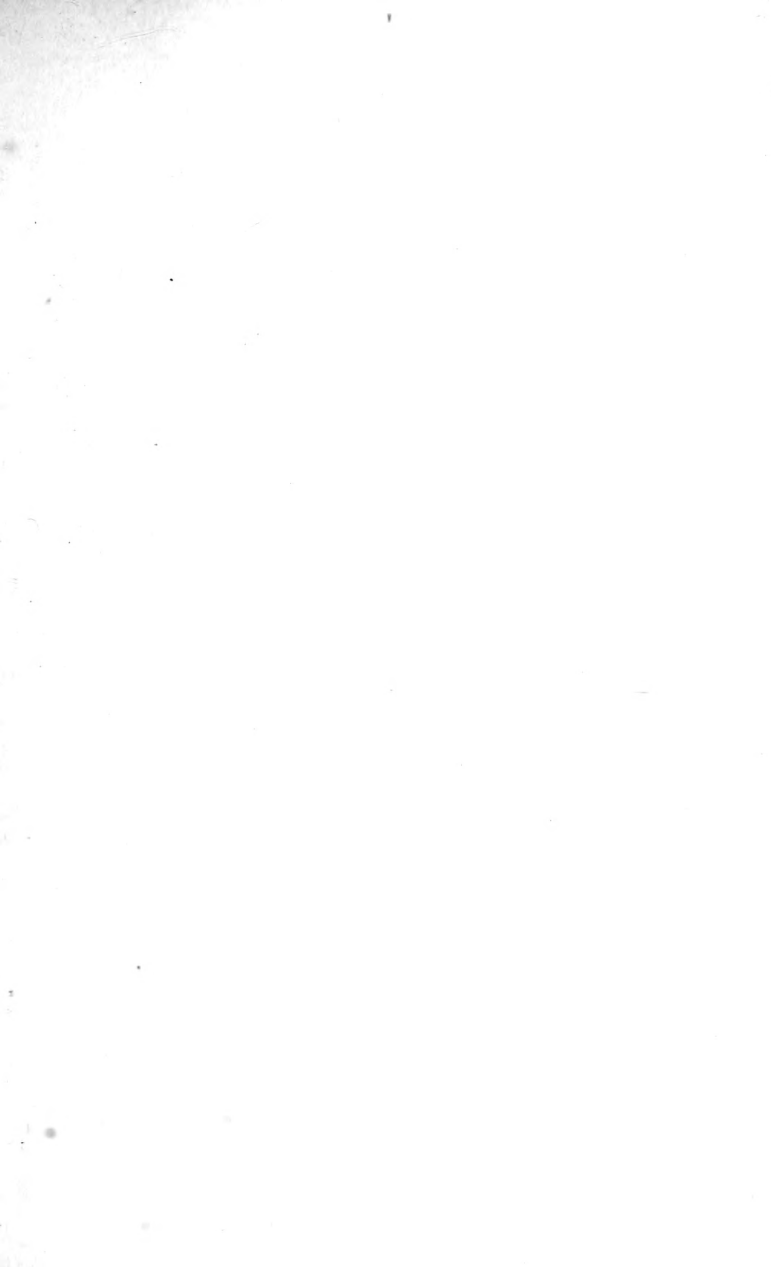


though in an unreasoning sort of way she regretted the millionaire. And the squire's dream had become a reality.

Did he know that it was so, in that dreamless land, to his full satisfaction? Who can tell? If he did know, what a very little thing it must have seemed to him!

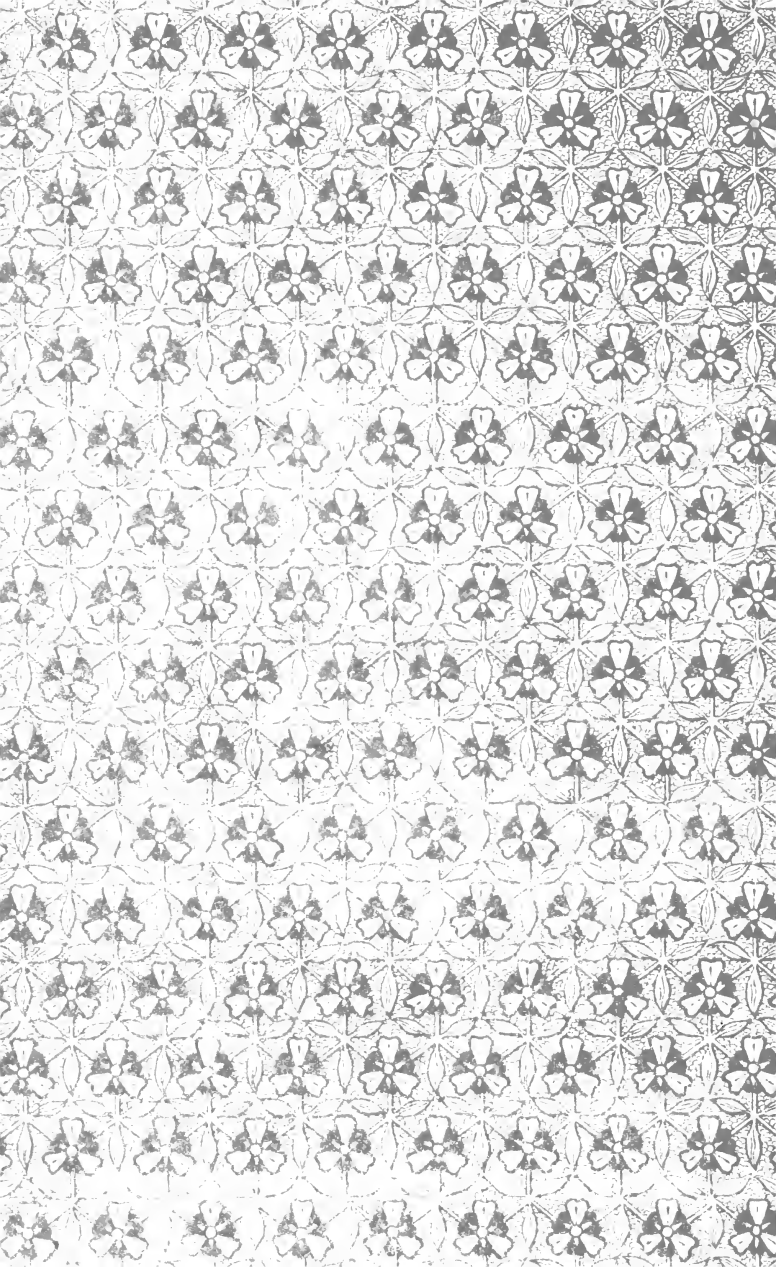
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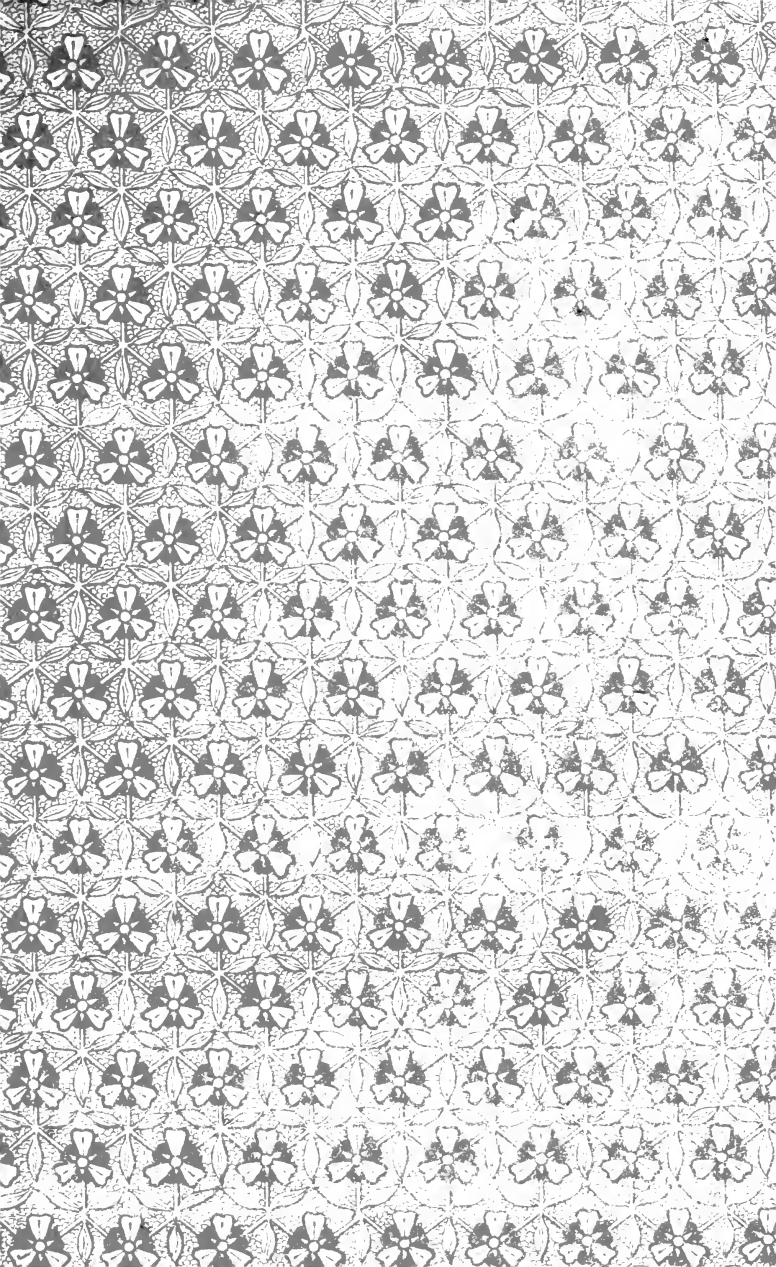
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